

returned to my worship of Virgil, whom Homer had for some years thrust into the background. I gradually wrote out *Bucolics*, *Georgics*, *Aeneid* from memory; and felt, as I have felt ever since, that of all minds known to me it is Virgil's of which I am the most intimate and adoring disciple . . . The discovery at seventeen, in an old school-book, of the poems of Sappho, whom till then I had known only by name, brought an access of intoxicating joy. Later on, the solitary decipherment of Pindar made another epoch of the same kind.<sup>1</sup>

None the less he came in later years to feel that this course of life had not been entirely suitable for him. Even as a child he had been, as his mother noted, self-willed and unusually emotional, and the early death of his father removed a source of discipline whose loss was not counterbalanced by exposure to the severities of boarding-school life. The fervid Hellenism of his university days did not supply the needed corrective. The classics, he was to write thirty years afterwards

drew from me and fostered evil as well as good; they might aid imaginative impulse and detachment from sordid interests, but they had no check for lust or pride.<sup>2</sup>

In the natural course of events an undergraduate of Myers' undeniable prominence would have been invited to join the Apostles; but though Arthur Sidgwick, who was a member, used to press his claims, the other Apostles could never stomach him, and he was not elected. The Apostles might have cut Myers back to size; but as it was he consorted mainly with the rowing set (he was an enthusiastic but not remarkable oarsman) before whom he could play the oracle unchallenged.

He was perhaps somewhat chastened in 1863 by an unfortunate *contretemps* in which he was landed by his own egotism. In the previous year he had won the University's Camden medal for Latin verse. Whilst composing his entry for the next competition he came across a volume of past Oxford prize poems, and he began to cull from it such lines as he thought worthy of preservation and force them in to his own poem. In so doing he was following what he conceived was Virgil's practice, and he made no secret of his activities to his friends, to whom he would remark in Virgil's words '*Aurum colligo e stercore*

<sup>1</sup> *Fragments*, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Fragments*, p. 10.

Ennii' (I am collecting gold from Ennius' dungheap). Custom, of course, sanctioned and even applauded the working of tags from other writers into one's own verses; but in appropriating a large number of complete lines (enough to make up about a quarter of his poem) he was clearly transgressing the accepted rules of the game. Although before the competition he had handed a copy of his entry with the borrowed lines marked to a graduate of Trinity, he very foolishly did not acknowledge them in the copy which he formally submitted. His poem was awarded the prize; but another competitor, getting wind of the insertions, tracked them down and complained to the Vice-Chancellor, at the same time withdrawing his own entry. There was a considerable rumpus, which ended in Myers resigning the prize. His appropriation of other people's lines was represented by his numerous enemies as a piece of straightforward cheating. This was not the view taken by the authorities but the imputation stuck, and the episode was still held against him in Cambridge circles even forty years later.<sup>1</sup>

Myers' Hellenic enthusiasms seem to have reached and passed their height during the summer of 1864. In February 1864 he was placed second in the first class of the Classical Tripos and, after graduating, he set out to travel in Greece and Asia Minor — no easy venture at that time. The actual sight of the Aegean lands in a curious way dissolved the passionate dreams of their departed loveliness which he had for so long cherished. Of Sicily, where once Praxilla sang, there remained but a few, lonely ruins; not even the faintest murmuring of Sappho's voice was borne by the sea-breezes along the shores of Lesbos.

I climbed to the summit of Syra,—

More like a man

Flying from something that he feared, than one  
Who sought the thing he loved.

For gazing thence on Delos and on the Cyclades, and on those straits and channels of purple sea, I felt that nowise could I come closer still; never more intimately than thus could embrace that vanished beauty. Alas for an ideal which roots itself in the past! That longing cannot be allayed; it feels 'the insatiability which attends all unnatural passions as their inevitable punishment'. For it is an unnatural passion; the

<sup>1</sup> On this episode, see G. C. Coulton, *Fourscore Years*, Cambridge, 1943, pp. 106–8.



Henry Sidgwick and Nora Balfour were married in April 1876. This of course made Sidgwick brother-in-law to a future Prime Minister; and through his sister's marriage to E. W. Benson he was already brother-in-law to a future Archbishop of Canterbury. To say that the Sidgwicks had friends in high places would be an enormous understatement. They were also, I should guess, among the most intellectual couples of the century; as intellectual as, say, the Leweses or the Grotes. It is however hard to think of anyone less like Mrs. Grote, that 'grenadier in skirts', than Mrs. Sidgwick. There was probably not a single occasion in the whole of Mrs. Sidgwick's adult life on which she talked assertively or acted flamboyantly. 'She is not exactly perfect,' Sidgwick wrote to his mother around the time of his marriage, 'any more than other people, but it is true that whatever defects she has are purely negative: all that is positive in her is quite quite good. I cannot even imagine her doing anything wrong.'

Myers too had had occasional thoughts of marriage, especially during the climax or climaxes of his agnosticism; and on at least one occasion he had proposed and been refused. Of late years, however, he had abandoned the idea; and his reasons for so doing will need examination, since they influenced the whole subsequent course of his life.

Myers' mother (it will be remembered) was a member of the immensely wealthy Marshall family.<sup>1</sup> The Marshalls had spent some part of their fortune in buying estates for themselves in the Lake District; and it was there that Susan Marshall had met the Rev. Frederic Myers. Susan Marshall was the daughter of the John Marshall (1765-1845) who had built up the family fortune, and she was the aunt of the John Marshall (1830-81) who in the eighteen-seventies was the titular head of the family. One of this John Marshall's brothers, named Walter James Marshall (b. 1837), had married in 1866 Annie Eliza, the twenty-one year old daughter of a Yorkshire clergyman and landowner, the Rev. J. R. Hill. The marriage produced five children; but it did not turn out happily. Both

further information about the Balfour family see Kenneth Young's *Arthur James Balfour*, London, 1963.

<sup>1</sup> On the Marshalls see W. G. Rimmer, *Marshalls of Leeds: Flax-Spinners 1788-1886*, Cambridge, 1960.

Walter and Annie were troubled with ill-health, and Walter became liable to alternating moods of almost pathological depression and excitement which were a source of constant anxiety to his wife. Walter's brother John seems to have been incapable of conducting his own affairs, and both of Annie's sisters died insane. If ever the stars ordained disaster for a marriage, it was for theirs. In the hope of improving matters, Walter and Annie passed a good deal of their time in various health resorts, English and continental. In the early months of 1871 they were at Vevey, in the Canton of Vaud. Myers, who had been in Italy, stayed with them for a few days in late February. He had of course known Walter, who was his first cousin, since they were children, and Annie at least since the time of her marriage. But it was only now that she seriously attracted his attention. Annie used to confide in Myers' mother, an extremely practical lady, and during walks beside the Lake of Geneva she told Myers himself something of her troubles. He was greatly struck by the courage and the absence of bitterness with which she faced a future that seemed to hold no hope of any break in the clouds. Some years later he visited Vevey again and remembered their talks:

For here she stood, and here she spoke, and there  
Raised her soft look thro' the evening's crimsoned air;  
And all she looked was lovely; all she said  
Simple, and sweet, and full of tears unshed;  
And my soul sprang to meet her, and I knew  
Dimly the hope we twain were called unto.<sup>1</sup>

It was over a year before he saw her again, but after that their relationship developed rapidly. In January 1873 he stayed with Walter and Annie at Scarborough, and rode and walked with them by the sea; at the end of March she came to stay with his mother at Cheltenham, and there were more walks and talks. Myers was increasingly impressed by the steadfastness and the sweetness of disposition which she showed under the most trying circumstances; his admiration for her turned to affection and, in the summer of 1873—at Hallsteads, the beautiful Ullswater home of his uncle, Arthur Marshall—to love. Annie had little enough to comfort her, and Myers'

<sup>1</sup> *Fragments*, p. 24.



unfailing kindness was one of the few bright spots in an otherwise bleak existence. She returned his love; but it was love of a rather different kind, perhaps, to anything he had known before. This stanza from a poem which he wrote in 1873 seems to describe a particular incident:

I had guessed not, did I not know, that the spirit of man was so strong  
To prefer irredeemable woe to the slightest shadow of wrong;  
I had guessed not, had I not known, that twain in their last emprise,  
Full-souled, and awake, and alone, with the whole world's love in their eyes,  
With no faith in God to appal them, no fear of man in their breast,  
With nothing but Honour to call them, could yet find Honour the best,—  
Could stay the stream of the river and turn the tides of the sea,  
Give back that gift to the giver, thine heart to the bosom of thee.<sup>1</sup>

It is hard to get any very clear picture of Annie. The references to her in family letters are mostly brief; and in Myers' autobiography, where she is called 'Phyllis', she is lost to sight behind the ripe clusters of superlatives—'that fountain of vivifying joy' is a sample expression. She must have been good-looking—the 'sea-like sapphire of her eyes' was to haunt Myers' memory. She was certainly a sensitive and highly cultivated person, whose natural gaiety and kindness was not quite overshadowed by her misfortunes. In addition to her domestic troubles, she had financial worries occasioned by continual visits to health resorts, and she suffered too from religious doubts closely akin to Myers'.

Myers' infatuation with Annie began at a time when his experiments in Spiritualism were first suggesting to him that he might at last have discovered in the imprisoning wall of agnosticism a panel which would give way before his frenzied beating. She was to him already, as it were, a small hint of the divine in an otherwise godless Universe; and soon his love for her became inextricably blended with his newly found religious hopes. She became at once a symbol and a manifestation of a

<sup>1</sup> *Fragments*, p. 19.

hidden world of timeless realities, a world once apprehended by Plato, and now obscurely revealed by the strange phenomena of Spiritualism.

. . . so soon as I began to have hope of a future life I began to conceive earth's culminant passion *sub specie aeternitatis*. I felt that if anything still recognisable in me had preceded earth-life, it was this one profound affinity; if anything was destined to survive, it must be into the maintenance of this one affinity that my central effort must be thrown. I was like a half-drunken man suddenly sobered by the announcement that he has come into a fortune. The first impulse was the mere resolve that nothing here on earth should prejudice that chance of happiness to be. Ogier and the Queen of France, in William Morris' poem, foreseeing possibilities too great to risk, looked each on the other

But for one moment; for too wise were they  
To cast the coming years of joy away.

Still more for me was there a sense that this was but the first moment of an endless passion; a sense of desperate reality, of age-long issues;—nay, as of the very crisis and visible morn of Fate. From that hour the moral victory was won;—achieved with steadfastness, though not yet with more than steadfastness; with no inward felicity in such obedience to the highest law . . .

Among the pure ideas which men in some dim fashion discern on earth, 'Wisdom,' says Plato, 'we cannot see, or terrible had been the love she had inspired.' To me it seemed as though I then saw Virtue clear. An effect was wrought upon me which neither Mrs. Butler's heroic Christianity nor Henry Sidgwick's rightness and reasonableness had ever produced. And although in my own heart I still felt the recurrent conflict between the savage and the sage,—between the half-human instinct and the deliberate choice of upright man;—yet in this one matter the impulse which prompted me to virtue became like the impulse of self-preservation itself. I knew in the deep of the heart that Virtue alone was safe, and only Virtue lasting, and only Virtue blest; and Phyllis became to me as the very promise and earnest of triumphant Virtue.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear *what* effect Annie had upon Myers; but *why* she had this effect is far from clear. Part of the answer may be that she herself showed 'mediumistic' tendencies or, as Myers might

<sup>1</sup> *Fragments*, pp. 38-9.



have put it, was especially responsive to spiritual influences. In his diary Myers notes that at several seances which they attended together she was 'affected'; and in August and September 1874 both participated with others of their family in a series of sittings at Hallsteads at which raps and table levitations were obtained without the assistance of any paid medium.<sup>1</sup>

Walter's and Annie's private troubles continued with fluctuations and occasional improvements throughout most of 1873, 1874 and 1875. In August 1873 Myers accompanied Walter on a cruise to the Canary Islands, and Walter's health improved for a while. The improvement did not last. On 26th May 1874 Myers wrote to Sidgwick that 'Walter was better, but far from well'; but shortly afterwards, on 13th June 1874, he reported 'W. is worse again & many troubles of various kinds hang over that unhappy household.' The following summer Walter and Annie spent a good deal of time at Old Church, a house in the grounds of Hallsteads, and Walter improved again; but in February 1876 he and Annie were at Torquay (Myers also went down there) hoping that things would better themselves.

Myers did whatever he could to help Annie. He saw her quite frequently in London (she and Walter had a house at 23 Thurloe Square) or in the Lake District; occasionally he took Walter off her hands for a day; and he wrote to her regularly. Only a few fragments of his letters now remain; they are not at all in his usual epistolary style, and were undoubtedly written with the object of distracting her from her cares. Here is part of one which he sent her in October 1873:

Then I went back to town & thence to Wykehurst with Gurney, & found Herbert Spencer there, & the Huths very nice. Gurney is at present arguing with Mrs. Huth about Thackeray, who is one of the articles of Mrs. Huth's creed. Herbert Spencer has been exhausted by an argument with me as to whether School Inspectors were necessarily, & by the very fact of their existence, not only useless but noxious. This he proved with much satisfaction to all present, but soon became dizzy with excitement, said that he had talked too long on important matters and begged now to be silent while the rest of the company

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *H.S.: A Memoir*, p. 293.

talked nonsense. He is certainly very interesting to meet, tho' one has to take him as he is, as a philosopher who is nothing but a philosopher. It is amusing to see him at billiards, standing with his cue in his hand, & with the aspect of a serious linen draper, while he explains the genesis of sentiment with reference to holing the white ball. Having demonstrated that to object to pocketing the white ball is a superstition unworthy of philosophers, he pockets it with a solemn triumph, & makes a miss into baulk.

Neither Myers' constant attempts to amuse and support Annie, nor the succession of health resorts to which Walter was taken, proved in the end of any avail. In April 1876 Annie went to stay with Myers' mother at Cheltenham; Myers walked with her through the woods of Leckhampton, and her company brought, as somehow it always did, peace to the restless sea of his emotions. He was not to enjoy such peace again for many years. When Annie returned to London Walter's trouble assumed an acute form. On the evening of 2nd May his behaviour became so excited that his brother George, and Annie's father, were telegraphed for. Walter was certified insane and taken to an asylum at Ticehurst in Sussex. There is a suggestion that this step was necessitated by the fact that he had been issuing cheques which he could not meet. On 3rd June 1875 Myers told Sidgwick: 'Gull has seen W. & expresses a very unfavourable opinion. Trewington tells me he thinks he will never leave Ticehurst. W. is now angry and complaining of plots etc. wh. much distresses A.'

Annie seems to have remained in London for most of June. There is a tradition in the Myers family that she and Myers agreed that under the circumstances it would be best if they stopped seeing each other; an entry in Myers' diary for 2nd July—'Miss Froude and A. on balcony. Farewell.'—marks their last meeting. A month later Myers set sail for Norway with his brother Arthur; their ship lay on the Humber through a moonlight night almost within view of the Yorkshire village where Annie was then staying.

Towards the end of August Annie found the strain of Walter's constant reproaches no longer bearable and begged to have the responsibility for decisions about him taken from her. A family conference held at Derwent Island, Keswick, from 19th August,



decided that a council of five persons should act on her behalf. She offered to take charge of Walter if it was thought right, but the suggestion was set aside, and it was agreed that he should be taken from Ticehurst and put into the care of a Dr. Hall of Brighton, as was his wish. On Monday, 1st September, Annie drove from Keswick to Old Church with Myers' mother. A few days afterwards the latter wrote to Myers:

I had been very anxious—we all had—at the fixed stony look in her face. She grew silent towards me, after having been quite frank & loving— & I could not with all my entreaties get her to speak of what was in her mind, after she had once said that she saw she had been quite wrong in everything—in this last step for W. (the certif.) & altogether about religion—in rejecting Xtianity—. I hoped she wd. pass thro' this crisis—& get a fuller happier faith—she was continually praying & getting me to read T. a Kempis to her—We came together on Monday & she brightened up during the drive & talked more like herself. I left her at O. Ch. at 7 p.m. thinking the children would cheer her. Next morning she was missing—a shawl by the lake—and in deep water she was found.

She had tried to cut her throat with a pair of scissors and, failing to inflict a fatal wound, had drowned herself in Ullswater. 'Indeed, indeed,' said Mrs. Myers, 'we must try and think that she has found the rest and peace which have been so sadly wanting to her lot.' Years of constant anxiety and ill-health, culminating in the stresses and the anguished vacillations of the past few weeks, had reduced Annie to a state of complete nervous exhaustion. Death had for long seemed to her the gateway to perfect peace; and now, in her extremity, she chose to pass through that gateway. A letter which she had written to Mrs. Myers from an hotel in Switzerland some five years previously tells us as much, perhaps, as we shall ever know of the thoughts which led her to the shores of Ullswater on that September night.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mr. A. Jarman, 'Failure of a Quest', *Tomorrow* 12 (1964), pp. 17–29, has suggested that in the spring of 1876 Myers got Annie pregnant. Walter lost his reason when he learned what had happened, Myers deserted her for fear of jeopardising his career and, in despair, she committed suicide. There does not seem to me to be a shred of evidence for this theory, and there is a good deal of evidence against it. See my comments *J.S.P.R.* XLII (1964), pp. 316–23, and *J.S.P.R.* XLIII (1966), pp. 277–81. Another story which at one time had some circulation (I think I have discovered its source) was that Myers and Annie conspired to have Walter

poor Mr. Seller's death has made a great impression on me,— he was exactly my age—to within a month, and I had so often wished to die not realising before what it would be to feel one's work neglected and undone. I had not known him very intimately before he was taken ill, but it always seemed to me that his disposition[s] of mind were good and pure, & *spiritual* as a man's could be—and his face and form were beautiful—with the beauty the old masters give to Christ. Before he was taken ill—when he looked at me—I used to feel it was more a spirit from another world than an earthly man. I could not understand his look then but now I do. The terrible weakness took away all power of thought & almost of speech & consciousness. I cannot explain why—but this death made me *fully*, I think, realize what it would be to die—it seemed as if it were I.—The end was perfect peace, though he had seemed anxious & troubled before. An hour before he died thinking he had almost lost consciousness, I took his hand and said 'Fear thou not—for I am with thee, be not afraid—for I am thy God.' He pressed my hand—a beautiful smile came over his face & he said 'no.' He never spoke again—he died with his hand in mine & I could not tell when his spirit fled.

Myers learned of her death on 7th September. Later the same year he described in verse the effect which the news had upon him:

Then came the news that, on me hurled,  
At once my youth within me slew,  
Made dim with woe the reeling world,  
And hid the heaven that shone therethrough.  
Far off a soulless music sang;  
Red-gold the glittering Baltic lay;  
What message on my spirit rang  
From that ensanguined end of day!  
All night I journeyed, on and on,  
Through Swedish forest silver-clear;  
All night a ghostly lumour shone  
From many a Swedish moss and mere;  
And strangely to myself I seemed  
A shade by shadowy Hermes led,  
With eyes that waked not, nay, nor dreamed,  
Through void dominion of the dead.

certified so that they could prosecute an affair unhindered. This story too is entirely without foundation; the facts of what happened are quite clear from surviving correspondence.



it rose to my hand held at the other end to the same height above it and in the same manner.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the most that can be said of the case of Stainton Moses is that whilst a rational man could hardly found a belief in paranormal phenomena upon it, it is in some respects supplementary and in others complementary to the far more puzzling case of D. D. Home. Moses' phenomena, if less well attested than Home's, are strikingly similar to them; and whereas Home, though not exactly a professional medium, owed his social successes largely to his mediumship, Stainton Moses was a private citizen who 'went very little into Society', and at first published under a pseudonym. However, these two cases, whether or not they buttressed each other were, merely on account of their pastness, likely to carry conviction only to the convinced. What was needed, if any firm and positive conclusions were to be reached, was a case currently active, a case whose genuineness could be incontrovertibly established by competent observers and scientific methods.

<sup>1</sup> P.S.P.R. IX (1894), pp. 259-60.

## X Eusapia

EGLINTON SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN the only physical medium of whom the Sidgwick group organised an extensive investigation between 1878 and 1894. There were of course occasional flashes in the pan; but none which led to any conflagration. The most curious was a gentleman who figures in the correspondence as 'Mr. D. of Barton-on-Humber'.<sup>1</sup> Some time in 1890 Sidgwick learned that a near relation of a friend of his had discovered himself to be a physical medium, and could lift up and carry around a table with his hands touching the upper surface only. This gentleman was a professional man of good social status and a well-known amateur *savant* in the directions of philology, anthropology and ancient astronomy. In November 1890 Myers went up to Barton-on-Humber to observe the marvels, and was shortly joined there by Mrs. Sidgwick. Sidgwick himself also paid a visit to Mr. D. at some period. Mr. D.'s *pièce de résistance* was to walk around in subdued light carrying a table apparently suspended from his finger-tips; once he held it up for fifteen seconds by the light of a duplex lamp and two candles, being the while within four feet of Myers and Mrs. Sidgwick. There were other phenomena: movement of the table without contact; removal of paper from a closed box; and alleged direct writing and drawing upon the paper.

Myers and Mrs. Sidgwick were impressed; the authenticity of the phenomena depended entirely upon Mr. D.'s word; but Mr. D. was, as Myers put it in a letter to Lodge, 'quite of our own standing socially, morally & intellectually'. An issue of *Proceedings* dealing with Mr. D.'s phenomena was contemplated.

<sup>1</sup> I am almost certain that 'Mr. D.' was Mr. Robert Brown, Jr., F.S.A., a solicitor of Barton-on-Humber.



But early in 1891 Mrs. Sidgwick received a letter from a lady who had been present at some of the sittings. During a seance this lady had twice glimpsed a rod concealed under Mr. D.'s wrist, and 'His right hand was not raised as completely from the table as the left hand was . . . also two of the middle fingers were kept close together on the table . . . On both occasions of the table going up the cuff was tightly strained to the arm.'

Mr. D.'s position was such that it was hardly possible to condemn him on the basis of one such doubtful piece of information; and furthermore he succeeded in demonstrating the phenomenon with bared arms. However, in the autumn of 1891 another lady sitter informed Mrs. Sidgwick that Mr. D. had told her that he wished to test Mrs. Sidgwick's powers of observation, and had asked her to assist him in levitating the table by fraudulent means. She complied; but when she heard that Mr. D. had signed a declaration that the phenomena had not been produced by normal means she felt obliged to reveal what she knew.

The Sidgwicks, out of regard for others, determined not to publish Mr. D.'s name but, in Sidgwick's ominous phrase, 'took effectual means to prevent a repetition of his trickery'. Sidgwick told the story at a general meeting of the S.P.R. on 13th July 1894, and concluded with the following words:

The experience that I have narrated certainly shows that a professional man of good social position and intellectual interests may carry on systematic deception for years, with no apparent motive except (I suppose) the pleasure of exciting the wonder of his deceived friends, and the pleasure of laughing in his sleeve at their credulity. But here the resemblance ends. Mr. [D.] (1) never professed to regard his 'phenomena' as a possible basis for religious or philosophical conclusions, or to take a serious interest in the scientific investigation of them: and (2) he consistently refused to publish any account of them in his own name. How entirely different Mr. Stainton Moses' behaviour was in both respects has been amply shown in Mr. Myers' article.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps it was because of the sad affair of Mr. D., and of the further cases of 'disinterested deception' at which Podmore darkly hints,<sup>2</sup> that nothing found its way into print concerning

<sup>1</sup> *J.S.P.R.* VI (1894), p. 278.

<sup>2</sup> *Podmore* II, p. 292.

the curious physical phenomena which, during the eightennineties, Myers thought he had found among his own friends. He briefly mentions these phenomena in various letters. For instance, on 8th October 1892 he wrote to Charles Richet:<sup>1</sup>

I have lately had table go up in air—in dark—but with only trusted friends present—viz. (1) Hon. A. Yorke, whom I think you know—a friend of 20 years' standing, Equerry to the Queen,—through whose mediumship I think the thing took place (2) Lady Kenmore (3) Miss Wingfield (4) Miss M. Wingfield—(5) FWHM. Also lots of intelligent raps & several very good *diagnoses*.

Again on 8th December 1892 he wrote to Richet:

There have been some physical phenomena obtained at Lord Radnor's place, Longford Castle, by Miss Wingfield and the Hon. *Alec Yorke*. I forget whether you know him—he is a very old friend of mine, & I have always known that he had *gifts*; but he is a *courtier* by profession—being Equerry to the Queen,—so he has been unwilling to take the thing up or to be connected with it . . .

They had a luminous matchbox (i.e. painted with luminous paint) carried about the room, & similar physical phenomena.

Myers continued to sit with Miss Wingfield at intervals for the rest of his life; though as far as I know he never published any of his results.<sup>2</sup>

Of all the physical mediums or alleged physical mediums who came the way of the Sidgwick group before the year 1900 the most interesting was undoubtedly a Neapolitan lady named Eusapia Palladino.<sup>3</sup> Eusapia's origins are very obscure—there are various conflicting and even romantic accounts of them. By

<sup>1</sup> Professor of physiology in the Faculty of Medicine at Paris. Gurney and Myers had met Richet during visits to the Continent to study hypnosis, in which Richet was interested.

<sup>2</sup> He mentions the raps which he witnessed in Miss Wingfield's presence, *Human Personality* II, p. 208.

<sup>3</sup> The best short account of Eusapia is by E. J. Dingwall, *Very Peculiar People*, London, n.d., pp. 178–217, which has a very useful bibliography. See also H. Carrington, *Eusapia Palladino and Her Phenomena*, London, 1909. The most extended work on her is E. Morselli, *Psicologia e 'Spiritismo'*, 2 vols., Turin, 1908. On her early days see G. Damiani in *Human Nature* VI (1872), pp. 272–4; and the same writer's letter in *The Spiritualist*, 15th March 1873.



1872, under the patronage of a certain Signor Damiani, she was beginning to obtain celebrity as a medium in the Naples district. The phenomena which took place in her presence, so Damiani said, included table levitations, the breakage of crockery, the appearance of mysterious lights, and detonations like pistol shots. Unfortunately these spiritual manifestations were not matched by any corresponding spirituality in Eusapia's character. She was vulgar, earthy, and addicted to bad company. There are even hints that during the seances sitters' purses and other valuables were rather too liable to dematerialise. It was clear that she was afflicted by a band of evil spirits, and British Spiritualists offered their advice to Signor Damiani in the columns of *The Spiritualist*. Miss Florence Cook of Hackney undertook a clairvoyant diagnosis of Eusapia's condition.<sup>1</sup> Miss Cook perceived that Eusapia kept low company, and was followed by an undesirable man; and there is every indication that Miss Cook was right.

For the next sixteen years or so Eusapia seems to have operated for the most part in and around Naples. She then came rather suddenly to the notice of the learned world as a result of two seances which Lombroso, the noted alienist, had with her in 1890. A somewhat remarkable incident occurred at the end of the second seance after the lights had been turned up. Eusapia, tied to her chair with strips of linen, was sitting in front of a curtained-off alcove. Inside the alcove, about one metre distant from the medium, was a small table. While the observers were discussing the seance, a noise was heard in the alcove, and from it there emerged the little table moving slowly towards Eusapia. An instant search revealed neither strings nor confederate.

Lombroso had long been known as a determined sceptic, and as a result of his conversion to belief in the phenomena a number of scientists held a series of seventeen sittings with Eusapia in Milan late in 1892.<sup>2</sup> The sitters included Lombroso himself; Schiaparelli, the astronomer; and Charles Richet.

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritualist*, 1st Aug. 1873.

<sup>2</sup> See summaries by F. Podmore, *P.S.P.R.* IX (1893-4), pp. 218-25; G. and C. Bell, *Bulletin of the Psychological Section of the Medico-Legal Society*, New York, 1893, pp. 18-29. Richet's accounts are in *Annales des Sciences Psychiques* III (1893), pp. 1-31. I have not seen the original report which was published in Supplement No. 883 of the *Italia del Popolo* (Dingwall, *op. cit.*, p. 215).

They witnessed a number of curious events. For instance, one side of a small table (weighing 20 lb.), the side nearest Eusapia, was tilted up in light which clearly illuminated the regions above and below it; it remained tilted for several minutes, whilst Eusapia's hands, her sleeves rolled up to the elbow, were visibly clear of it, and her feet were beating time against each other. Some photographs were taken. However, the conditions under which most of the phenomena took place were not very satisfactory (though they satisfied all the sitters except Richet); and it was noticed that levitations of the table occurred only if Eusapia's skirt puffed out to meet the table and she held her hands above it. The most interesting things took place during the later sittings, at which the seance room was divided into two halves by curtains. Eusapia was placed facing the sitters on a chair at the junction of the curtains, which were then joined over her head. Her front was dimly illuminated by a lantern with red glass slides, and her hands and feet were visibly held. Under these conditions the sitters obtained occasional tantalising glimpses of extra hands which were thrust out between the curtains. Sitters were also touched or grasped through the curtains; and one sitter, Aksakov, put his hand through the curtains above the medium's head, where it was touched by another hand. It was then seized and pulled inside, and a chair from behind the curtain was pushed into it.

Richet was the only member of the Milan committee who did not sign the report endorsing the genuineness of the phenomena. He felt that too many possibilities of fraud remained. None the less he was immensely intrigued, and in 1894 he arranged that Eusapia should visit him at an island which he owned off the south coast of France—the Île Roubaud, near Hyères. The only house on the island was Richet's own; and at least it seemed impossible that Eusapia could introduce a confederate.

Richet invited Myers and Lodge to join the party, and they arrived on 21st July 1894. Lodge has left an extended description of their stay.<sup>1</sup> They seemed to have had a delightful time—at least if one sets aside some trifling inconvenience from mosquitoes and flies. The heat was such that during the day Myers and Lodge roamed the island in pyjamas, swimming periodically; Richet spent his mornings fishing from a small boat to

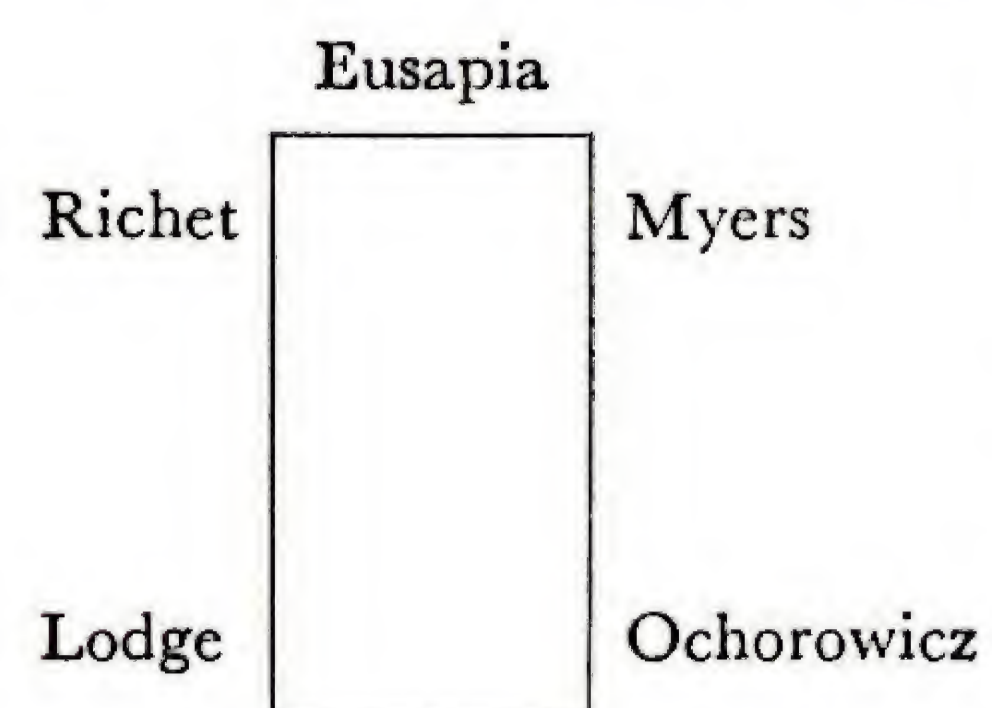
<sup>1</sup> *Past Years*, London, 1931, pp. 292-306.



obtain food for the party. In the evenings they held seances in a sitting-room on the ground floor. During the seances the door of this room was normally locked, and the shutters of its two windows were fastened without being quite closed. A note-taker (either Richet's secretary, M. Bellier, or a Polish investigator, J. Ochorowicz) sat outside a window and took down all that those in the room called out to him. The sitters, including Eusapia, would group themselves round a table; at the beginning of a seance they would sit by lamp-light, later in the dim light that came through the shutters from the note-taker's lamp and from the moon. They witnessed a fair cross-section of Eusapia's phenomena—table levitations, grasps, touches, lights; materialised hands, billowing of curtains, raps, the movements of objects, the playing of musical instruments, the precipitation of scents, and supposed direct writing—all, it should be emphasised, when the medium seemed to be well controlled. As illustrations I shall now quote extracts from the published accounts of the first sitting, and the fourth and last sitting, those of 21st and 26th July 1894.<sup>1</sup> It was not thought necessary to print the accounts of later sittings in such detail as that of the first.

*First Sitting, July 21st, 1894*

... 12.35—Sittings at the small table were now resumed, with a change of position. The table was moved considerably further



from the window and positions were as shewn. The shutter was more widely opened so as to admit light from the bright moon outside. The candle of the recorder also gave some little light, but the lamp inside the room was not lighted. R. held both arms and one hand of E., while M. held both feet and her

other arm. R. then felt a hand move over his head and rest on his mouth for some seconds, during which he spoke to us with his voice muffled. The round table now approached. R.'s head was stroked behind. R. held both E.'s knees, still retaining one hand while M. held the other, and the round table continued to approach in violent jerks.

<sup>1</sup> From *J.S.P.R.* VI (1894), pp. 350-1, 355-7.

12.49.—A small cigar box fell on our table, and a sound was heard in the air as of something rattling. R. was holding head and right hand; M., holding left hand, raised it in the air holding it lightly by the tips of its fingers, but with part of his own hand free. A saucer containing small shot (from another part of the room), was then put into this hand of M. in the air. A covered wire of the electric battery came on to the table and wrapped itself round R.'s and E.'s heads, and was pulled till E. called out. Henceforth R. held her head and body, M. kept one hand and both feet, while L. held the other hand, and in this position E. made several spasmodic movements, each of which was accompanied or followed by violent movements of the neighbouring round table.

12.57.—The accordion which was on the round table got on to the floor somehow, and began to play single notes. Bellier counted 26 of them and then ceased counting. While the accordion played, E.'s fingers made movements in the hands of both M. and L. in accord with the notes as if she were playing them at a distance with difficulty. The lightly-touched quick notes were also thus felt by L. with singular precision. Sometimes the touch failed to elicit a response, and this failure was usually succeeded by an interval of silence and rest.

1.5.—E. being well held, M. heard a noise on the round table at his side, and turning to look saw a white object detach itself, from the table and move slowly through the clear space between his own head and E.'s, visibly crossing the painted stripes of colour on the wall of the room. L. now saw the object coming past M.'s head and settling on the table. It was the lamp-shade coming white side first.

1.10.—The round table was moved further off and blows came upon it. L. was touched on the back, while R. saw both E.'s hands (which were still, as always, being held), and her body was also visible.

1.17.—The 'châlet', [musical-box] which was on the round table, now began to play, and then visibly approached, being seen both by M. and L. coming through the air, and settled on our table against M.'s chest. Shortly afterwards it moved away from M.'s chest on to the middle of our table and played there. Then it got on the floor between R. and E., and R. said 'enough of that music.' It stopped, probably because run down. M. was repeatedly and vigorously pushed on the back while L. was trying to see what was touching him [changing places with O. for the purpose]. L. could see M.'s back readily, but could not see anything upon it, though M. kept on calling out that he



was being pushed, and that things which pushed like that must be visible. Soon afterwards the sitting was suspended and E. came out of the trance. During the latter half of the sitting, E. had taken one of M.'s fingers and drawn some scrawls with it outside R.'s flannel jacket, which was buttoned up to his neck. M. said 'She is using me to write on you', and it was thought no more of. But after the séance, when undressing, R. found on his shirt front, underneath both flannel jacket and high white waistcoat, a clear blue scrawl; and he came at once to bed-rooms to shew it.

*Fourth Sitting, July 26th*

On 26th July a sitting was held in which Ochorowicz took notes outside the window, Bellier having left the island; and the observers were Richet, Myers and Lodge. The room was again arranged and guarded by Lodge, who again locked the door when the other two observers had entered with Eusapia. The first incident of note was some extremely loud and dangerous-sounding bangs on the square table and on the small table at which they sat. These bangs were louder than could be made with hand blows [and were sufficient to cause alarm for the safety of the hands among which they sometimes occurred]. L. and M. distinctly and simultaneously saw a small bright light rapidly moving in front of them above the table, like a spark or a firefly. The small table rose high into the air in fair light, and remained there barely touched by E. on the top, while eleven was counted.

An arm chair in the window, four feet of clear space intervening between it and the back of Eusapia, now began to move. It was very visible to Lodge and to all; the shutters being open and sky-light glinting on the back of the chair. It was seen to approach and otherwise move a few inches several times, it also made intelligent visible tilts in reply to questions. Eusapia was well held, and all conditions perfect. No one was near the chair. . . .

Noise as of key being fumbled in the door, and Ochorowicz from outside asked who was unlocking the door. Eusapia's hands were well held and no one was near the door. The clear space of several feet near door was plainly visible. Blows occurred on the door. The key then arrived on the table, [and was felt there by L.] It disappeared again, and was heard to be replacing itself in the door with a sound as of the door being locked (or unlocked); then the key came again on to the table into Richet's hand and stayed there. (At the beginning of the

séance the door had been locked, and at the end it was still locked; judging by sound, it had *probably* been unlocked and locked again during this episode. The door certainly remained shut all the time.) Richet saw an indistinct black square-looking object which seemed to prolong the key when it was brought towards his head.

There was light enough to see the position of everybody's normal hands all the time on this occasion, and we were sitting some four or five feet distant from the door. [It was a perfectly distinct phenomenon.]

Richet next saw something detached, like a bird in the air, going to M.'s head. At the instant he saw it touch, M. called out that he was touched on the head.

L., R., and M. then all saw the curious imitation-hand or feather fingers stretching horizontally over the vertical gap between the half-open shutters: a thing which L. had several times seen before.

M. was seized from behind while standing, and vigorously pulled and shaken about; while all four were standing holding hands round the table. L. saw him moving and felt a transmitted pull. . . .

Medium now conducted the standing group to near the writing desk in the corner, and made three little movements with her held hand. They seemed to take effect and tilt the desk backwards, after a very short but appreciable interval. Then she moved further away and repeated the action; the same movement of the bureau occurred, but with more delay. Then once more, this time two metres from the desk; and the interval elapsing before the response was now greater, perhaps as much as two seconds.

Myers and Lodge were quite convinced of the genuineness of the phenomena. 'There is *no doubt* as to this business,' wrote Myers to William James on 1st August 1894, '& we are all plunged into the grossest superstition, John King<sup>1</sup> and all. The stubborn sceptic may still say if he likes, like the German of Homer, that the phenomena are not attributable to "John King" but to "some other person of the same name"!—or the double of Eusapia, etc.'

Myers and Lodge immediately requested the Sidgwicks to come out and see for themselves which, somewhat reluctantly,

<sup>1</sup> Like so many other physical mediums, Eusapia, claimed 'John King' as one of her 'guides'. Cf. above, p. 17.



they agreed to do. To James Bryce Sidgwick wrote on 8th August 1894:

... the call of duty has descended on us in connexion with the S.P.R.—in whose affairs a crisis is impending. Three chief members of our group of investigators: F. Myers, O. J. Lodge, and Richet, (Professor of Physiology in Paris) have convinced themselves of the truth of the physical phenomena of Spiritualism... we have read the notes taken from day to day of the experiments, and it is certainly difficult to see how the results recorded can have been produced by ordinary physical means.

At the same time as the S.P.R. has now for some years acquired a reputation for *comparative* sanity and intelligence by detecting and exposing the frauds of mediums; and as Eusapia's 'phenomena' are similar [in] kind to the frauds we have exposed, it will be a rather sharp turn in our public career if our most representative men come forward as believers. Consequently we both feel bound to accept Richet's invitation and go for ten days or a fortnight to the 'Île Roubaud', and if possible, obtain personal experience. It will be rather a bore, and, I fear, tiring to my wife: but we both feel that it has to be done.<sup>1</sup>

The Sidgwicks' reluctance to investigate further instances of supposed physical phenomena is quite understandable in view of their previous unhappy and uncomfortable experiences; and equally understandable is their concern for the public reputation of the Society of which they were the principal representatives. None the less their distaste for physical phenomena and their tenderness for the S.P.R.'s public image were leading causes of the unfortunate *Affaire Eusapia*.

For the time being however all seemed to go well. Towards the end of August Lodge and the Sidgwicks set off for the south of France. Eusapia was now at Richet's château at Carqueiranne, near Toulon. They had half a dozen sittings in a cosmopolitan assembly which for part of the time included Ochorowicz, Schrenck-Notzing of Munich, and Dr. Ségard, chief medical officer of the French Mediterranean fleet. (Lodge was most impressed by Mrs. Sidgwick's ability to speak alternately French with most of the company, English with himself, German with Schrenck-Notzing, and Italian with Eusapia.) Phenomena took place mostly in the dark, or in very dim light,

<sup>1</sup> Bodleian, MS Bryce 15 fol. 83.

and were hence not so impressive as those which Lodge and Myers had witnessed in July. None the less at their very first sitting, Sunday, 19th August 1894, the Sidgwicks obtained phenomena which they regarded at the time, and in the discussion afterwards, as conclusively supernormal. Mrs. Sidgwick controlled Eusapia's left hand, constantly verifying that there had been no substitution; Sidgwick similarly controlled the right hand. Ochorowicz lay underneath the table and held Eusapia's feet. Under these conditions Mrs. Sidgwick felt mysterious touches and pushes and was embraced by an unaccountable hand and arm; and Sidgwick felt a hand placed on his head. Later seances followed much the same pattern. Whilst Eusapia was supposedly well controlled, sitters would be touched, grasped or prodded as if by hands; sometimes hands would actually be seen. There were occasional movements of objects in the room. For instance, at the Sidgwick's final sitting, on 4th September, during which—according to Mrs. Sidgwick—'it was never completely dark, and sometimes the light was very fair', a melon and a small wicker table were brought from behind the medium and placed on the table round which the company sat. The most curious phenomenon was perhaps the occasional sounding of notes on a piano behind Eusapia and seemingly out of her reach. Mrs. Sidgwick's unpublished notes (still in the S.P.R. archives) of one such incident at the seance of 21st August go as follows:

The final sounding of notes occurred at the end of séance and when the light had been partially turned up so that key board of piano could be seen. R. had both E.'s hands—her arms stretched across the table to him. I had my left foot without shoe on her right foot and my right foot more or less in contact with her left foot, but the foot moved a good deal and I could not answer for contact all the time. If E. did the piano at all it must have been with her *right* foot and it would almost certainly have been seen.

At a meeting of the S.P.R. on 26th October 1894 Lodge gave an account of his experiences. He stated his definite conclusion that some at any rate of the phenomena were undisputably genuine. He averred that the sitters were perfectly calm and cool, not susceptible to hypnosis, and well aware of the necessity for careful control of the medium—control which they



aided by 'continually calling out to each other as to the security or otherwise of that portion of the body of the medium which they had in trust'. Collusion on the part of the sitters was unthinkable. The remote and uninhabited nature of the island would have rendered the introduction of a confederate impossible, even apart from the fact that Lodge himself had prepared the seance room beforehand and locked it during sittings. Lodge was particularly struck by the fact that when effects were produced upon a distant object Eusapia would often make sympathetic movements:

When the accordion is being played, the fingers of the medium are moving in a thoroughly appropriate manner, and the process reminds one of the twitching of a dog's legs when he is supposed to be dreaming that he is chasing a hare. It is as if Eusapia were dreaming that she was fingering an instrument, and dreaming it so vividly that the instrument is actually played. It is as if a dog dreamt of the chase with such energy that a distant hare was really captured and killed, as by a phantom dog.<sup>1</sup>

At the same meeting of the Society Mrs. Sidgwick gave a short account of her own and her husband's experiences at Carqueiranne, and Sidgwick said that 'although he kept his mind open to suggestions as to methods of producing an illusory belief that a medium's hand was being held when it was in fact free, he felt bound to say that none of the methods of this kind that were known to him appeared to him to afford an admissible explanation in the present case'.<sup>2</sup>

Hodgson however was not similarly convinced of the authenticity even of the most striking phenomena. When he read Lodge's account in manuscript he cabled to Myers (23rd November 1894) in an attempt to prevent its publication. Myers said to Lodge in a letter of the same date that he felt inclined to reply to Hodgson as the Delphic Apollo did to the Locrians: 'If you who have never seen the cattle-bearing Libya know it better than I who have, I greatly admire your cleverness.' Hodgson did not succeed in preventing publication, but in the April 1895 *S.P.R. Journal* he printed a strong criticism of the sittings on the island. His principal points were these:

1. The accounts of the seances are not sufficiently specific as

<sup>1</sup> *J.S.P.R.* VI (1894), p. 333.

<sup>2</sup> *J.S.P.R.* VI (1894), p. 345.

to the exact way in which the hands and feet of the medium were secured. Previous records showed that during sittings Eusapia habitually indulged in violent spasmodic movements, as a result of which she might manage to persuade both controllers to hold the same hand, or might even be able to replace a hand or a foot with a dummy. We are entitled to assume that the same movements occurred at the island; and also that Eusapia as usual managed to dictate the conditions of holding so that, e.g., her hand or foot rested on top of that of the person 'controlling' her. In no case is it clear that one investigator was controlling *both* hands at a crucial juncture, thus ensuring that one hand was not doing duty for two. One freed hand would be sufficient to produce most of the phenomena reported.

2. Various table levitations might be explained if Eusapia had had a strap looped round her chest and shoulders under her blouse, with a hook hanging down from it at the front. She could have attached the hook to the table, and then have raised the table by leaning backwards, even keeping it level by pressing against a leg.

3. The cases of observed movements, and of appearance of hands, at a distance from the medium can be accounted for on the supposition that she had a rod concealed about her, perhaps with a dummy hand at its end, or had rigged up secret cords or threads in the seance room beforehand. She was not searched before sittings, and slender cords or rods would have escaped the notice of the investigators in dim light.

In private Hodgson expressed himself even more strongly. In a letter to Mrs. Sidgwick dated 1st February 189[5] he announced that Richet, in common with all previous investigators of Eusapia, was entirely ignorant of methods of trickery.

Lodge's conviction [Hodgson went on] I do not regard as of special value, partly because, as I recall (rightly or wrongly) [wrongly—see *J.S.P.R.* II, p. 290] he was impressed by Eglington, but chiefly because of the *detailed notes*, wh., *pace* Myers & Lodge—I cannot think of without a shudder. *Myers* (bless his dear soul!) *can* be as sceptical as anyone about some individual person or thing, but if he once gets his sympathies enlisted,—his evidence isn't worth 2 straws. This is part and parcel of his big, poetic divine genuine soul, & he can't help it!



Myers, Lodge, Richet and Ochorowicz were not convinced by Hodgson's arguments, and each of them wrote a reply.<sup>1</sup> Hodgson, they remarked, had made unjustified inferences about the inadequacy of their hand and foot controls by trading on the fact that details are not given in the reports, and even by interpreting words pedantically. Three of the investigators were very experienced sitters—Myers observed that he had had 367 seances before the S.P.R. was founded, and that if, after so much practice, he could not be certain of his hand-holds, he had better stop sitting or else take a back seat. All were fully aware of the stock ways in which fraudulent mediums could free a hand. They held Eusapia's hands right across the palms and fingers, frequently the thumbs too, and there was no room for another sitter's hand to grasp it as well. Myers remarked that furthermore it would have been impossible for him to mistake Lodge's massive and muscular hand for Eusapia's small one, or to mistake the quivering and perspiring hand of Eusapia for a stuffed glove. Eusapia did not writhe spasmodically or appear to be trying to free herself; during some phenomena she was visibly held; sometimes both her hands *were* held by one person. There were on some occasions even phenomena when both hands were held by one person and both feet by another. Once a large table (48 lb.), visible to the sitters, was raised, moved and overturned when Myers was between Eusapia and it. It was four feet from Myers' back, and Eusapia was tightly wedged between Lodge and Myers. Her movements, or rather lack of them, could be distinctly seen.

It could, I think, not be said that Hodgson emerged clearly victorious from these arguments; though he certainly emerged undaunted. It was arranged that the matter should be put to further test in the summer. Eusapia was invited for a protracted stay at Myers' house in Cambridge. Careful preparations were made for her reception and investigation. A practice sitting was held at which, to Myers' amusement, Sidgwick threw himself under the table, his long white beard trailing on the floor, to practise holding Eusapia's legs. Eusapia arrived at Cambridge on 30th July 1895, and at first things seemed promising. At 7.30 p.m. on the evening of the next day, Wednesday, 31st July, while it was still daylight, she gave an

<sup>1</sup> *J.S.P.R.* VII (1895), pp. 55-79.

impromptu sitting to Myers and his wife. Myers' contemporary notes (now in the S.P.R. archives) are as follows:

After getting raps at two deal tables in turn, we sat at a small deal table, and EM secured Eusapia as follows, at Eusapia's request. E's foot on Eusapia's two feet—steadily kept there throughout what follows—E's right hand on Eusapia's knees [and again steadily kept there]. Eusapia's two hands fully in sight, during some of the levitations resting on EM's left hand & arm, wh. lay on the table, in daylight, about 18 inches from my eyes. During other levitations I held Eu's right hand well up in the air & E held her left hand on top of or an inch or two above the table—no thumb or part of hand of Eu's under table—

From my position I cd. always see Eu's body to waist & her arms & hands, & when table was up in air I cd. see her whole body, knees with EM's hand on, & feet with EM's foot on; thin plain deal leg of table being an insignificant obstacle to my view.

Under these circumstances the table rose in the air with all feet off the ground five or six times during about ten minutes. We had time between the elevations to discuss our *positions*, wh. we decided that we could not improve. Table rose about six or eight inches, & remained in the air from one to four seconds. We were of course on the look out especially for this phenomenon, & each rise was preluded by swaying and agitation of the table, so that our attention was each time fully on the alert. The séance being impromptu, we had no note-paper & cannot be certain as to the *number* of elevations. On each occasion it appeared to us that no known force cd. have raised & sustained the table as we in fact saw it raised & sustained.

Unfortunately the remaining twenty sittings were of nothing like this level of interest, the phenomena being, on the whole, distinctly less impressive than those witnessed at Carqueiranne by the Sidgwicks. This was all the more unfortunate because various famous scientists—Lord Rayleigh, J. J. Thomson, Francis Darwin—were persuaded to attend some of the sittings; to say nothing of the Maskelynes, father and son, and of Richet and Lodge, all of whom attended at least once. The conditions under which most of the sittings were held were these. The party sat round a table in the spacious drawing-room of Leckhampton House, Eusapia's hands being controlled by the sitters on either side of her and her feet either by those sitters



or by someone lying under the table. One of the sitters (usually Miss Alice Johnson) sat at a separate table, often in a part of the room separated from the rest by curtains, and took down the sitters' comments by the light of a shaded lamp or candle.<sup>1</sup> Eusapia's staple phenomena—table levitations, touches and grasps of the sitters, and movements of small articles or pieces of furniture not too far from her—were fairly frequent. The light was generally dim or non-existent, but those who held Eusapia's hands and feet felt, on the whole, comparatively certain that they had not lost control. However, some suspicious circumstances were noticed quite early on. Eusapia was very difficult over the controls she would permit. She would generally not allow one sitter to control both hands (which would, of course, have made substitution of one hand for two difficult) and she frequently insisted on laying her hand on top of the controller's. She refused to be tied in any way and sometimes objected to her legs being held. At the second sitting, on 3rd August, Mrs. H. M. Stanley (Myers' sister-in-law and wife of the explorer), who had Eusapia's right hand resting on hers, noted that during phenomena the hand seemed to be narrowed or partially withdrawn. After this sitting Mrs. Sidgwick recorded her conviction that Eusapia executed the touches with a freed hand; a view which she found grounds for expressing again after various subsequent sittings.

However, not all the phenomena which occurred could be explained on any such simple hypothesis. There were, for instance, the curious protuberances from Eusapia's body which some sitters occasionally observed. At one point the third sitting, 4th August 1895, Eusapia was standing up; one of her hands was held by Myers, the other by Miss Johnson. Mrs. Myers sat on the floor and held the feet. Under these conditions Myers and Miss Johnson were touched. They raised Eusapia's hands in the air, and again Miss Johnson was pushed from behind, and a nearby chair was moved a number of times. Looking upwards, Mrs. Myers could see against the ceiling, which was illuminated by light from the note-taker's candle, several kinds of protrusion from Eusapia's body. She listed them as follows, in a statement preserved in the S.P.R. archives:

<sup>1</sup> These notes are in the S.P.R. archives and I have drawn upon them in what follows.

1. An arm exactly like Eusapia's in which I saw even the place where the sleeve ends with the thickening of the outline & wrinkles of the sleeve & edge of under cuff (which is white). This projection had hand & fingers and held the chair. II. Two long simultaneous prolongations—like neck of swan; one of which I saw prod Mr. Myers on the back three times with force—but without visible hand—the other went round to Miss Johnson & was lost to my view—III. A kind of stump linked to the body by a narrower neck coming from about the hips or flank which struck Mr. Myers in the lower ribs (he says). This I think also struck me—I was struck on the thigh—but I could not see in the low shadow what it *was* that struck me. No bending of the medium's body visible to me—no movement of legs or feet.

Mrs. Myers and Mrs. Stanley changed places, and Mrs. Stanley saw a hand growing out of Eusapia's back and touching Myers' back. After the sitting Mrs. Myers helped Eusapia to undress, and folded up her clothes for her. There was no sign of any machinery. Other sitters, for instance Lord Rayleigh, perceived similar, though somewhat less spectacular, effects at later sittings.

Another extremely curious phenomenon which took place in several sittings was a billowing out of the window curtains. Thus at the end of the fourth sitting, when Eusapia was no longer held, Miss Alice Johnson brought in the photographic lamp and put it on the table, unshaded, but with its back to Eusapia. Eusapia was now sitting at a little distance from the table, with her back towards, but clear of, the curtains of a large window. Richet was sitting on her left, Rayleigh on her right. A curtain (not one in front of an open pane) swelled out behind Lord Rayleigh several times, on some occasions as much as 2½ feet, Professor Thomson thought. Eusapia was clearly visible to all, and so were the curtain movements. Lord Rayleigh put his head up against the curtain and felt it pressing against him several times as it moved. He put his hand between Eusapia's back and the curtain and felt along the floor between her and it, but found nothing. The movement was as if the curtain were blown out by a wind. It did not, however, bulge out from the top, but from some distance down.

The situation after the series of sittings had progressed some way was thus ambiguous. There were on the one hand clear



hints of hand-substitution; but on the other hand there were such very odd things as the blunt yet seemingly living protuberances from Eusapia's body, and the movements of the curtains. After the fifth sitting, on 7th August, Sidgwick and Myers sent £40 to Hodgson to enable him to cross the Atlantic and try to resolve the issue. Hodgson arrived at Cambridge on Thursday, 29th August. He took part in the thirteenth sitting, the next evening, and in all subsequent sittings.

Hodgson thought that the established practice of guarding Eusapia's hands and feet as carefully as possible, and of calling out the conditions of control to the note-taker, simply helped Eusapia by informing her when it was unsafe for her to execute some fraudulent manoeuvre. Accordingly he made his own control as lax as possible, passing himself off as an amiable imbecile. He found that Eusapia was working her hands close together, and then by a deft move inducing both controllers to accept the same hand, thus freeing the other hand for mischief. She would also free a foot in a similar way. Practically all the phenomena at the last sittings were undoubtedly fraudulent, and all the regular sitters were able to observe the fraud in action. They came to the conclusion, in the light of the insight gained into Eusapia's methods, and making due allowance for imperfect observation, that 'nothing but trickery had been at work in the Cambridge series of experiments'.<sup>1</sup> On Monday, 16th September, Eusapia left Cambridge, accompanied by Hodgson. She had not as yet been fully informed of her exposure.<sup>2</sup>

There were however not a few people, especially among continental investigators, who felt that all the trickery had not been on Eusapia's side. Criticism of the Cambridge sittings<sup>3</sup> grew over the next few years, and resolved itself under the following heads.

<sup>1</sup> *J.S.P.R.* VII (1895), p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> The Maskelynes, father and son, attended one sitting, but failed to detect the trickery which they suspected and whose *modus operandi* they suggested. When the S.P.R. account, which made no mention of them, came out, J. N. Maskelyne wrote a long account of their sitting, which was published in the *Daily Chronicle* for 29th Oct. 1895. A somewhat acrimonious correspondence followed, and the matter was taken up in other papers. The *British Medical Journal*, 9th Nov. 1895, had a scoffing leader, to which Sidgwick replied on 16th Nov.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. J. Maxwell, *Metapsychical Phenomena*, London, 1905, pp. 405-17; A. de Rochas, *L'Extériorisation de la Motricité*, Paris, 1906, pp. 201-64; C. Richet, *Thirty Years of Psychical Research*, London, 1923, p. 456; Carrington, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-7; Dingwall, *op. cit.*, pp. 187-92; J. Page Hopps, *J.S.P.R.* VII (1895), p. 164.

(a) Eusapia was not happy at Cambridge, and therefore could not have been in good form. She disliked the English climate and English food. She was an unlettered peasant, with tastes only for *pasta* and for naughty Neapolitan stories, and she would have been completely at sea in the cultivated surroundings of Leckhampton House.

(b) It had always been known that when in a state of trance or of dissociation Eusapia would, if not properly controlled, cheat in the crude ways discovered by Hodgson. She was especially liable to do so when her powers were low. Hodgson's relaxation of control would therefore have produced the cheating which it was designed to detect. If he had been properly conversant with the previous literature on Eusapia he would have been aware of this fact.

The S.P.R.'s defence against such criticism (the defenders being Sidgwick, Mrs. Sidgwick and Miss Alice Johnson) seems to have been as follows.<sup>1</sup>

(a) Eusapia was perfectly happy at Cambridge. Her smallest whim was indulged. She was taken out shopping at her hosts' expense, and taken on other excursions. People played croquet and other games with her—she cheated at these too. She was allowed to cook her own Italian meals in the kitchen. Professor Sidgwick even flirted with her (a fact not made available to the impious) and she was photographed wearing his academic robes.

(b) Hodgson laid his trap for Eusapia only *after* it seemed pretty certain that she was indulging in trickery. His aim was simply to get details of her methods. The continental observers who rushed to claim that they had known all along about Eusapia's propensity to cheat if not properly controlled had not committed their knowledge to print until after Hodgson's exposé. Eusapia's trickery was of a skilful and practised kind, and could not be attributed simply to her being in trance and not responsible for her acts.

It appears to me that Hodgson's critics have something of a

<sup>1</sup> See Mrs. Sidgwick's review of Morselli, *P.S.P.R.* XXI (1909), pp. 516-25; Miss A. Johnson's Note on Maxwell's Criticisms, *P.S.P.R.* XVIII (1904), p. 501; pp. 67-9 and 77-8 of her 'Mrs. Henry Sidgwick's Work in Psychical Research' *P.S.P.R.* XLIV (1936), pp. 53-93; a MS. fragment, 'Eusapia Palladino', by Miss Johnson, in the S.P.R. archives (the first draft of a projected account and defence of the Cambridge sittings).



case. No doubt Eusapia *was* kindly treated at Cambridge, and no doubt she hugely enjoyed the croquet, shopping and other fuss. But that she found the investigators congenial as persons I find it hard to believe; for what points of contact could there possibly have been between the ignorant and earthy Eusapia, who was liable upon awakening from her trances to throw herself into the arms of the nearest male sitter with unmistakable intent, and a group of earnest and highly educated enquirers into the inmost secrets of the Cosmos? And it is certainly not true that Hodgson was the first to describe Eusapia's methods of trickery; nor is it true that it was only after Hodgson's discoveries that continental investigators noted Eusapia's propensity to cheat if she could when power was low. As a matter of fact this had been pointed out by Ochorowicz (from personal experience) in the *S.P.R. Journal* for April 1895.<sup>1</sup> It would of course have been quite reasonable for Hodgson to have relaxed control had his intention simply been to find what modes of trickery Eusapia generally employed and to improve control at later sittings. But Eusapia's trickery, which was of a simple and well-known kind, and certainly not such as could have produced more than a fraction of the phenomena at the Île Roubaud, was in fact used to brand all her phenomena as imposture, and herself as merely a vulgar cheat. Lodge 'did not see eye to eye with Hodgson in the matter':<sup>2</sup> and I am inclined to see eye to eye with Lodge.

In the *S.P.R. Journal* for April 1896 Sidgwick wrote sternly that a full account of the Cambridge sittings had not been printed because

... it has not been the practice of the S.P.R. to direct attention to the performances of any so-called 'medium' who has been proved guilty of systematic fraud ... In accordance, therefore, with our established custom, I propose to ignore her performances for the future, as I ignore those of other persons engaged in the same mischievous trade.

And when, a year or two later, Myers wished to re-open investigations because of startling reports from the continent, Sidgwick squashed him by remarking: 'I cannot see any reason

<sup>1</sup> *J.S.P.R.* VII (1895), p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Lord Rayleigh (the younger) 14th Nov. 1924 in the S.P.R. archives.

for departing from our deliberate decision to have nothing further to do with any medium whom we might find guilty of intentional and systematic fraud.'<sup>1</sup>

Richet however did not accept Sidgwick's and Hodgson's view of the matter. He continued to experiment with Eusapia and became absolutely convinced that at times she produced genuine phenomena. He wrote to Lodge on 28th October 1898 that he had seen extra hands in half-light whilst Eusapia's hands were visibly held. He had once grasped and held one of these supernumerary hands for 25 seconds. Late in 1898 he persuaded Myers who, though disgusted with Eusapia, had, like Lodge, never completely lost faith in the phenomena, to come to his house at Paris where Eusapia had been giving some remarkable sittings. Myers attended two sittings, on 1st and 3rd December 1898; the other sitters were Richet, Th. Flournoy (a distinguished Swiss psychologist), the Duc and Duchesse de Montebello (the French Ambassador at St. Petersburg and his wife), Emil Boirac (present at the second sitting only), and Mme Richet, who acted as note-taker.<sup>2</sup> In the first sitting the light was better than Myers had ever seen it with Eusapia—a duplex lamp, unscreened though turned low, a fire, and moonlight coming through a window. It was 'light enough to see every finger of Eusapia; every feature; every detail of her dress'. Eusapia's hands were always far apart, and during all important phenomena both were visible; both her feet were held at all important times by an observer underneath the table. She made no attempt to juggle her hands or her feet. Under these conditions a zither, which had been placed in a curtained-off window recess behind the medium (the window being shuttered and bolted) was moved and played. It was then taken from the recess, brought round behind the sitters (so that they were between it and Eusapia), played again, and brought over Myers' shoulder on to the table. An amorphous and cloudy-looking projection emerged from behind the window curtains, raised the zither, struck eight or ten notes upon it, and then disappeared. While both of Eusapia's hands were visibly held,

<sup>1</sup> *P.S.P.R.* XLV (1938), p. 165.

<sup>2</sup> Flournoy's account of the first sitting will be found in his *Esprits et Mediums*, Geneva, 1911, pp. 405-6; Boirac's account of the second sitting in his *Psychic Science*, London, 1918, pp. 311-14. Madame Richet's Notes, seemingly edited and translated by Myers, are in the S.P.R. archives.



Myers put his hand inside the curtains; it was there grasped by another hand. Amongst other phenomena which occurred were billowing of the heavy window curtains and touchings of the sitters.

At the second sitting similar phenomena took place. The light was somewhat lower, but Eusapia was still visibly controlled. One of the sitters held the zither behind the curtain. It was seized, played upon, and carried to the table. Myers was grasped through the curtain by a strong hand.

Myers was fully convinced, and when he returned to England he proposed to publish an account of his experiences. Hodgson was at that time editor of the S.P.R.'s *Journal* and *Proceedings*. He seems to have felt it his duty to prosecute a sort of Holy War against fraudulent mediums, and had been planning to sponsor an article by J. G. Smith which should constitute 'some definite classing' of Eusapia 'amongst the ranks of tricksters'. He was distinctly put out by Myers' reconversion. 'All my plans would have gone smoothly as a bell,' he wrote on 17th January 1899, perhaps to Miss Alice Johnson, 'and would have redounded to the credit of the S.P.R. so far as I can see, but I am quite open to call for criticisms of my intentions. Now however . . . the situation has changed.' Myers' notes (or Mme Richet's notes, rather) he described as 'worthless' (and they are indeed on the abbreviated side); he was himself 'absolutely convinced that Eusapia is a trickster from beginning to end'. In the upshot all that was published was a letter from Myers stating that as a result of recent experiences he had once again been converted to belief in Eusapia's phenomena.<sup>1</sup> No further action was taken. This was, it seems to me, a very great pity. By the time that the S.P.R., in consequence of further reports from the continent, at last got round to publishing a lengthy paper about Eusapia<sup>2</sup> she was almost at the end of her career, and ten years had been lost in which the experimental ingenuity of Lodge or Rayleigh might just possibly have resolved some puzzles which still remain. Though, indeed I very much doubt whether the Sidgwick group's

<sup>1</sup> *J.S.P.R.* IX (1899), p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> The Hon. Everard Feilding, W. W. Baggally, and Hereward Carrington, 'Report on a Series of Sittings with Eusapia Palladino', *P.S.P.R.* XXIII (1909), pp. 309-569.

otherworldly interests would have been furthered by the investigations.

That there are very considerable puzzles about these phenomena appears to me undoubted, even on the basis of such tiny portions of the evidence as I have been able to mention. And in the particular case of Eusapia the puzzles were highlighted by the 1909 paper mentioned above. The principal sitters—the Hon. Everard Feilding, Hereward Carrington, and W.W. Baggally—had as thorough a knowledge and experience of trick methods as any trio of investigators ever assembled; they visited Eusapia at Naples on her home terrain; and as persons they were far more congenial to her than the Cambridge intellectuals. In eleven sittings held in the middle one of the three adjacent hotel rooms which they occupied they obtained the most astounding phenomena, sometimes in good light, almost always in a light sufficient for adequate visual checking. The minute by minute account of phenomena and conditions of control which they dictated to a stenographer is without doubt the most interesting record of its kind ever published. Objects were moved, and an accordion played, inside a cabinet (a corner of the room which had been curtained off) while the medium was visibly and securely held outside it; objects were carried out of the cabinet and placed on the table; the sitters were touched and gripped by hands visible and invisible which sometimes melted away in their grasp; amorphous heads, things like primitive cabbages on stalks, and other knobbly excrescences were extruded between the curtains of the cabinet; the table round which the sitters were grouped was completely levitated many times; and a small footstool in the room was several times moved along the floor in clear view and certainly not attached to any strings.

These sittings took place outside the period with which this book is concerned, and I cannot give a full account of them. The following year, after a disastrous visit to the United States, Eusapia's powers, whatever they were, seem to have faded completely. She died in 1918.

It would be unwise to generalise too widely on the basis of the career of this somewhat doubtful character. None the less my own feeling is that those who might be called the die-hard members of the Sidgwick group—especially Richard Hodgson



and Miss Alice Johnson—were unduly impressed by the early demonstrations of the possibilities of malobservations and errors of memory in reports of seances.

The early demonstrations and illustrations of malobservation and errors of memory seemed to establish these points:

1. That even in good light, and under conditions favourable to observation, an intelligent sitter can be so distracted and misled that a piece of legerdemain which will lead to the subsequent production of a *fait accompli* (let us say some writing on a slate) can be carried out under his very eyes.

2. That in darkness it is similarly almost impossible even for an intelligent and alert sitter to maintain continuous tactual observation of a medium's hands, etc., and so assure himself that the phenomena (which he does not *see* in progress) are not fraudulent.

3. That in dim light, emotional or credulous sitters may grossly misinterpret phenomena which they actually witness; may, e.g., mistake a mask and some muslin drapery for a deceased person known to them.

In the case of Eusapia Palladino (not to mention that of Home) phenomena—and ones which I do not think that any conjurer has ever duplicated under comparable conditions—were at times actually *seen in progress* in fair light by competent and seemingly balanced observers; and it is not at all obvious (at least to me) that it is reasonable to set these phenomena unceremoniously aside (which Hodgson and Miss Johnson wanted to do) on the pretext that the witnesses of them are bound to have been hopelessly misled. In 1908 Everard Feilding became so exasperated by Miss Alice Johnson's armchair scepticism about the Naples sittings that he exclaimed in a letter to her dated 6th December 1908: 'I wish to goodness you had come out when I wired so that instead of sniffing at us when we return you might be sniffed at yourself by Podmore.'<sup>1</sup>

The rectitude of those not exposed to temptation can be very annoying. However, in fairness to Miss Johnson it must be added that she was as willing to impugn her own powers of observation as those of others. Nothing in the whole Eusapia story is odder than the document<sup>2</sup> in which Miss Johnson, writing about the Cambridge sittings some years after their

<sup>1</sup> S.P.R. archives.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 239n above.

occurrence, tries to convince herself that on the occasion when Mrs. Myers had seen protrusions from Eusapia's body, whilst Myers controlled Eusapia's right arm and Miss Johnson her left, she (Miss Johnson) had lost control of herself in the excitement of the moment and suffered from an hallucination.

I believe that at an early stage of the sitting I let Eusapia's left arm go without knowing it, and that my impression of holding it the rest of the time was what may be described as a hallucinatory after-image of my actual holding at the beginning. It is possible that she substituted some other object, which produced on me the illusion of an arm, but I am more inclined to think that it was an actual hallucination on my part.

There is a certain appealing humility about this statement. Had Hodgson been in Miss Johnson's place he would almost certainly have alleged that it was Myers who was led astray.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The case of Eusapia Palladino affords, of course, splendid opportunities to *esprits forts*; their usual approach to the 1908 sittings is to recount her well-known methods of eluding control (which have already been mentioned), and to suppose that such was the investigators' 'will to believe' that they allowed her to put them into practice. See, e.g., D. H. Rawcliffe, *Illusions and Delusions of the Supernatural and the Occult*, New York, 1959, pp. 320–32. But the 1908 trio of investigators, as is quite apparent from their report, were well aware of Eusapia's little ways and, if they suffered from a 'will to believe', they had at any rate managed to suppress it until 1908.

Podmore suggested (*J.S.P.R.* XIV (1909), pp. 172–6, and *The Newer Spiritualism*, London, 1910, pp. 114–44) that most of the phenomena in the more exciting 1908 sittings could be explained if one assumed that Eusapia had deceived Baggally into letting go of the hand or foot which he was controlling; Baggally's reply (*J.S.P.R.* XIV (1909), pp. 213–38) is to the effect that Podmore simply ignores phenomena which do not fit into his theory. Baggally appears to me to be right. C.E.M. Hansel, *E.S.P.: A Scientific Evaluation*, New York, 1966, p. 212, gives several reasons why the conditions under which Eusapia sat in Naples were 'highly favourable' to illusion; but they stray almost as far from the facts as his criticism of Mrs. Piper (see below, Appendix B).



my boudoir a few days previously, but which contains no mention of him nor his name.<sup>1</sup>

It is very difficult to know what to say of such cases. So far as I am aware no one ever supposed that Miss Wingfield was a conscious cheat. The most plausible explanation of the veridical information received in this case, and in other, somewhat comparable cases, is of course that the medium or sensitive had read the information in some book or periodical and then forgotten about it, and that when she later on fell into a state of slight dissociation it came to the fore again. On the other hand Miss Wingfield certainly did at times seem to have veridical crystal visions in which it was seemingly impossible for her to cheat; and even in the rather scanty records which have been published there are a surprising number of accurate communications from or concerning deceased persons whom it seems most unlikely that she could have known. But then again, what of the raps, so suspect to psychical researchers? It is at least amusing to think of paranormal raps disturbing the quiet of Salisbury Cathedral.

One might make rather similar comments upon another set of cases, those connected with two automatists called Mrs. Everett and Mrs. Turner.<sup>2</sup> Myers, who knew them, regarded their integrity as beyond question; so did Hensleigh Wedgwood, who discovered the case. Mrs. Turner, the younger sister, but a widow, was according to Hensleigh Wedgwood, 'far the stronger influence' in producing the writing; however, in most of the cases actually published, Mrs. Everett and Wedgwood himself operated a 'planchette' board. Again we have an admixture of inexplicable physical phenomena; again we have a number of cases of veridical communications from communicators ostensibly unknown to the operators; again we cannot discount the awkward possibility that the medium had somewhere read or heard the information concerned and had stored it at a subconscious level. For instance, to take one of the more dramatic (and perhaps therefore less plausible) cases: Hensleigh Wedgwood and Mrs. Everett on one occasion obtained some osten-

<sup>1</sup> *P.S.P.R.* VIII (1892), pp. 508-9.

<sup>2</sup> They figure in *P.S.P.R.* IX (1893), pp. 92-106, as 'Mrs. R.' and 'Mrs. V.' Mrs. Everett's diaries are preserved in the S.P.R. archives. She is not to be confused with the Mrs. Everitt mentioned above, pp. 73, 200.

sible communications from a lady called Alice Grimbold, who gave a very detailed account of the circumstances surrounding a murder in which she had been involved in 1605, and of her own subsequent execution. These particulars were eventually verified from a decidedly recondite book, James Thompson's *History of Leicester* (1849). Both operators averred that they had never heard of this book in their lives; and yet it is quite impossible to show that one or other of them had not run across it but forgotten it. Mediums *might* be, not people with the faculty of communicating with deceased persons, or even with clairvoyant gifts, but simply people with unusually sticky subconscious memories.

What of course was needed to upset such arguments was a medium who could produce veridical communications to order; who could, that is, regularly produce 'communications' from the deceased friends and relatives of persons brought, preferably without advance notice or even under pseudonyms, to see her. If a medium did this sufficiently often, and with sufficient details, it could not possibly be claimed that she was serving up only information which she had previously acquired and forgotten about. These conditions were met, at times more than amply, by an American medium, Mrs. Leonora E. Piper.<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Piper was, if we forget an alleged ability to shrivel flowers, innocent of the shady physical phenomena.

Mrs. Piper lived in Boston, Massachusetts, where her husband was employed in a large store. She possessed considerable good looks and, in sharp contrast to the vulgar physical mediums, was an undoubted lady. Her range of information and of conversation however seems to have been decidedly limited; so much so that Myers, in a letter to William James, unkindly referred to her as 'that insipid prophetess'. Her intellectual limitations were however an advantage when it came to the question whether she might have obtained her results fraudulently for, as will I think become clear later, to have done so she would have needed to have practised fraud of the most

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Piper's biography has been written by her daughter. See Alta L. Piper, *The Life and Work of Mrs. Piper*, London, 1929; see also M. Sage, *Mrs. Piper and the Society for Psychical Research*, London, 1903.



ingenious kind. And her means, even when supplemented by her earnings as a medium, would certainly not have enabled her to employ agents.

Her career as a medium began more or less accidentally in 1884. In anxiety as to her own health, she visited a blind healing medium named J. R. Cocke. At her first visit she lost consciousness for a few minutes; at her second she passed into a trance and wrote on a piece of paper a message for one of the sitters, Judge Frost of Cambridge, Mass. Judge Frost, though a Spiritualist for thirty years, described it as the most remarkable he had ever received.

Mrs. Piper then began to hold sittings at her home for her family and friends. She spoke in trance and was at first purportedly controlled by, among others, such distinguished persons as Bach and Longfellow. However, after a while a *soi-disant* French doctor, who gave the name of Phinuit (Cocke's guide had been called 'Finney'), became chief 'control'. Phinuit spoke in a gruff male voice, in a curious mixture of Frenchisms, negro patois, and Yankee slang, sometimes swearing vulgarly. His diagnoses and prescriptions were often successful in a rough and ready way. He would give sitters accounts of the doings of living relatives and would transmit messages (often with appropriate gestures) from deceased ones, whom he would describe as being beside him. Very much more rarely, a deceased person would speak himself.

Rumours about these sittings reached the ears of William James' mother-in-law, Mrs. Gibbens, who managed to obtain a sitting for herself, and another for her daughter, James' sister-in-law. They returned with remarkable tales of the medium's knowledge of their family concerns. James, though he 'played the *esprit fort*' before his female relations, was sufficiently interested to go anonymously to a sitting. He was distinctly startled by what he heard.

The medium . . . repeated most of the names of 'spirits' whom she had announced on the two former occasions and added others. The names came with difficulty, and were only gradually made perfect. My wife's father's name of Gibbens was announced first as Niblin, then as Giblin. A child Herman (whom we had lost the previous year) had his name spelled out as Herrin. I think that in no case were both Christian and sur-

names given on this visit. But the *facts predicated* of the persons named made it in many instances impossible not to recognise the particular individuals who were talked about.<sup>1</sup>

James was sufficiently struck to continue his own sittings with Mrs. Piper during 1885 and to send some twenty-five other persons to her under pseudonyms. In the spring of 1886 he gave a brief account of the results in the *Proceedings* of the American S.P.R. Fifteen of the persons who had had sittings with her received at the first sitting 'names and facts . . . which it seemed improbable should have been known to the medium in a normal way'. The remainder got nothing but unknown names and trivial talk. Unfortunately only five of the sittings were stenographically reported in full. None the less 'My own conviction', said James, 'is not evidence, but it seems fitting to record it. I am persuaded of the medium's honesty, and of the genuineness of her trance; and although at first disposed to think that the "hits" she made were either lucky coincidences, or the result of knowledge on her part of who the sitter was and of his or her family affairs, I now believe her to be in possession of a power as yet unexplained.'

Pressure of work forced James to give up the enquiry into Mrs. Piper at this point. But in May of the following year (1887) Richard Hodgson arrived in Boston to become secretary of the American S.P.R. He found the openness of American manners, even of Boston manners, far more to his taste than the restrained conventions of England; and in the intellectual yet sporting circles of Boston's Tavern Club he found, perhaps for the first time in his life, a society in which he felt perfectly at home. His appointment had been especially urged by Mr. R. Pearsall Smith, a pronounced sceptic, who hoped that Hodgson's skill in detecting fraud would soon demolish the villainous Mrs. Piper.<sup>2</sup> This may well have been Hodgson's hope too, for he later confessed that his *amour propre* had never quite recovered from his failure to expose her.

The damage to Hodgson's *amour propre* began with the anonymous sittings which he had himself during the course of 1887. It seemed most unlikely that Mrs. Piper, in Boston, could by any device get to know intimate details about Hodgson's friends

<sup>1</sup> P.S.P.R. VI (1890), p. 652.

<sup>2</sup> Baird, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-3.



and relatives in Australia; yet such details were given at her sittings. Here is an extract from his notes on his first sitting.

Phinuit began, after the usual introduction, by describing members of my family.

'Mother living, father dead, little brother dead.' [True.] Father and mother described correctly, though not with much detail. In connection with the enumeration of the members of our family, Phinuit tried to get a name beginning with 'R', but failed. [A little sister of mine, named Rebecca, died when I was very young, I think less than eighteen months old.]

'Four of you living besides mother.' [True.]

Phinuit mentioned the name 'Fred.' I said that it might be my cousin. 'He says you went to school together. He goes on jumping-frogs, and laughs. He says he used to get the better of you. He had convulsive movements before his death, struggles. He went off in a sort of spasm. You were not there.' [My cousin Fred far excelled any other person that I have seen in the games of leap-frog, fly the garter, &c. He took very long flying jumps, and whenever he played, the game was lined by crowds of schoolmates to watch him. He injured his spine in a gymnasium in Melbourne, Australia, in 1871, and was carried to the hospital, where he lingered for a fortnight, with occasional spasmodic convulsions, in one of which he died.]

Phinuit described a lady, in general terms, dark hair, dark eyes, slim figure, &c., and said that she was much closer to me than any other person: that she 'died slowly. Too bad you weren't with her. You were at a distance. It was a great pain to both of you that you weren't there. She would have sent you a message, if she had known she was going. She had two rings; one was buried with her body; the other ought to have gone to you. The second part of her first name is—sie.' [True, with the exception of the statement about the rings, which may or may not be true . . .]<sup>1</sup>

During 1888 and 1889 Hodgson continued to sit with Mrs. Piper himself, and to arrange sittings for others and collect reports from them. Unfortunately shortage of funds prevented full stenographic records being made of more than a few sittings. However, quite a number of sitters were able to make full notes, and sometimes too Hodgson himself acted as note-taker, and was able to keep virtually a complete record. Some

<sup>1</sup> p. 60 of R. Hodgson, 'A Record of Certain Phenomena of Trance', *P.S.P.R.* VIII (1892), pp. 1-167.

of the sittings were very remarkable; and, as a check upon Mrs. Piper's honesty, she and her family were shadowed for some weeks by detectives. No evidence was discovered that she went around enquiring into the affairs of possible sitters, or that she received letters from agents who might have done so. It then occurred to Hodgson and William James that a further valuable test would be to remove her to a totally new environment, where she could have neither talkative friends nor established agents. Accordingly Mrs. Piper was invited to England by a special committee consisting of Lodge, Myers and Walter Leaf. She set off in November 1889, accompanied by her two children, whom she refused to leave behind.

Mrs. Piper stayed twice in Liverpool with Lodge, twice in Cambridge with Myers and the Sidgwicks, and twice in London in lodgings chosen by the committee. Careful precautions were taken to prevent her from obtaining information about her hosts and about possible sitters. Almost all her sitters were introduced anonymously. Lodge's house contained (by chance) completely new servants, who could have known little about his concerns. He locked up the family Bible and photograph albums.<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Piper allowed him to examine her mail and to search her baggage, though the payment which she received—30 shillings a day—would hardly have enabled her to employ agents. Myers obtained for Mrs. Piper and her children a servant who could have known nothing of himself and his Cambridge friends; he chose sitters, he tells us 'in great measure by chance', sometimes introducing them only after the trance had begun. Of some sittings stenographic records were kept, of the majority full contemporary notes were taken; those made of the most successful sittings, the twenty-one held under Lodge's auspices, being in fact the fullest.<sup>2</sup>

The conclusions which the committee came to were substantially in agreement with those previously reached by James and Hodgson; the views of all five of these gentlemen, and also of the Sidgwicks, may be summarised as follows:

<sup>1</sup> None the less, C. A. Mercier, *Spiritualism and Sir Oliver Lodge*, London, 1917, p. 116, triumphantly demands to know if Lodge had not a family photograph album and a family Bible from which Mrs. Piper might have obtained her information.

<sup>2</sup> See 'A Record of Observations of Certain Phenomena of Trance' by Myers, Lodge, Leaf and James, *P.S.P.R.* VI (1890), pp. 436-659.



1. Mrs. Piper's behaviour in her normal state never gave the least ground for suspicion. No one ever detected her in a suspicious action. Indeed, her patience under the trying scrutiny to which she was subjected was most praiseworthy. Furthermore, her trance appeared to be genuine—when she was entranced she could be pricked, cut, burned and even have an ammonia bottle held under her nose without being disturbed.

2. Mrs. Piper's chief 'control', Dr. Phinuit, though a distinctive 'character', gave no clear indication that he was anything other than a secondary personality of Mrs. Piper's. His accounts of his earth life were contradictory, and investigation did not confirm them. It was true that his diagnoses of the ailments of sitters and their friends were often shrewd, and his prescriptions successful; but he gave no serious indication of being able either to speak or to comprehend French, his supposed native tongue.

3. Worse than this; Phinuit's behaviour was at times altogether shady. On a bad day he would keep up a constant babble of inane conversation, interspersed with false assertions about the sitters and their deceased relatives. He would fish for information in a quite blatant manner, and if he got any he would serve it up again a few minutes later as though he had known it all along. Sitters who came only on bad days, or by their demeanour provoked bad days, might go away disgusted and suspect the whole performance of being a fraud.

4. But on a good day Phinuit might, with hardly any fishing, relay copious and very largely correct 'communications' from the deceased friends and relatives of sitters. Sitters who, for whatever reason, struck lucky in this way, might go away quite dumbfounded, feeling it quite inconceivable that Mrs. Piper could by any normal means have got access to the information which had been retailed to them.

Both Lodge and Myers received, purportedly from their own deceased friends and relations, information which greatly impressed them. To test the hypothesis that Mrs. Piper might have obtained this information, somehow, by surreptitious enquiries of her own, Lodge set an agent to see how much of the information summarised in this passage he could unearth by enquiries on the spot:

It happens that an uncle of mine in London, now quite an old man, and one of a surviving three out of a very large family, had a twin brother who died some twenty or more years ago. I interested him generally in the subject, and wrote to ask if he would lend me some relic of his brother. By morning post on a certain day I received a curious old gold watch, which this brother had worn and been fond of; and that same morning, no one in the house having seen it or knowing anything about it, I handed it to Mrs Piper when in a state of trance.

I was told almost immediately that it had belonged to one of my uncles—one that had been very fond of Uncle Robert, the name of the survivor—that the watch was now in possession of this same Uncle Robert, with whom he was anxious to communicate. After some difficulty and many wrong attempts Dr. Phinuit caught the name, Jerry, short for Jeremiah, and said emphatically, as if a third person was speaking, 'This is my watch, and Robert is my brother, and I am here. Uncle Jerry, my watch.' . . .

Having thus ostensibly got into communication through some means or other with what purported to be a deceased relative, whom I had indeed known slightly in his later years of blindness, but of whose early life I knew nothing, I pointed out to him that to make Uncle Robert aware of his presence it would be well to recall trivial details of their boyhood, all of which I would faithfully report.

He quite caught the idea, and proceeded during several successive sittings ostensibly to instruct Dr. Phinuit to mention a number of little things such as would enable his brother to recognise him. . . .

'Uncle Jerry' recalled episodes such as swimming the creek when they were boys together, and running some risk of getting drowned; killing a cat in Smith's field; the possession of a small rifle, and of a long peculiar skin, like a snake-skin, which he thought was not in the possession of Uncle Robert.

All these facts have been more or less completely verified. . .<sup>1</sup>

Two things may be noted in passing about this material. Firstly the summary of it does not mention a number of erroneous statements and of statements likely to be true of anyone, which Uncle Jerry, or Phinuit, made (the full records, with annotations, are printed at the end of Lodge's report). Secondly the hypothesis of telepathy from the sitters seems completely

<sup>1</sup> *P.S.P.R.* VI (1890), pp. 458-9.



ruled out. If there was any thought-transference, it must have been from Uncle Jerry's surviving brothers, both of whom lived hundreds of miles away.

Lodge's agent, Mr. G. A. Smith, who was certainly a very able man, spent several days in and around Barking, quizzing oldest inhabitants, looking up records, and so on; but he was unable to get further than establishing the probable location of 'Smith's Field'.

Mrs. Piper returned to the United States in February 1890. Despite the strain of being thrown among and scrutinised by total strangers, she had achieved some striking successes. After her return she entered with the American branch of the S.P.R. into an agreement which gave Richard Hodgson a large measure of control over her sittings in the next few years. In return she was to receive about £200 a year. Hodgson himself devoted much of the rest of his life to studying her, often in the face of considerable hardship and financial difficulty. He lived in one room and his slender salary was irregularly paid. This last was a cause of considerable friction between the English and the American branches of the S.P.R. To save Hodgson from actual starvation Myers and Sidgwick had frequently to subsidise him; yet the American branch had members much wealthier than they.

The result of Hodgson's self-sacrifice, the Sidgwick group's generosity, and Mrs. Piper's co-operation, was the accumulation of a detailed and at that time unique set of seance records, which extended over a good part of the next fifteen years. Sitters were introduced anonymously and with great precaution; full notes were generally taken either by Hodgson or by Miss Edmunds, his secretary; and the sittings were subsequently annotated by the sitters. 'Evidential material' continued to flow in. S.P.R. members watched the spectacle, many with acute interest, a few with irritation, and some with a growing and exhilarating hope that these experiments marked the dawn of a new era in man's knowledge of the Universe.

For some years Phinuit remained the chief communicator, and things went on much as before. Hodgson was convinced that Mrs. Piper possessed supernormal powers, but in his first paper on her<sup>1</sup> he was not disposed to accept that her 'com-

<sup>1</sup> *P.S.P.R.* VIII (1892), *loc. cit.*

municators' really were the deceased persons they purported to be. He found their personalities too fragmentary to be convincing. He inclined instead to believe that in her trances Mrs. Piper could obtain, telepathically or by clairvoyance, information which she would then serve up as though from a deceased person. But new developments in the Piper phenomena, especially the emergence of at least one communicator whose personality was more than fragmentary, caused him to alter his opinions and to accept the communicators almost at face value.<sup>1</sup>

During a sitting on 22nd March 1892, there appeared as a control a young man named George Pellew. Pellew came from a well-known Washington family and had been killed in a riding accident a few weeks earlier. He had had literary and philosophical interests and was known, though not intimately, to Hodgson. Five years previously he had anonymously had one and only one sitting with Mrs. Piper; there was however no reason to suppose that she could then have learned anything about him. Pellew gradually replaced Phinuit as chief control, and as the principal intermediary between sitters and their deceased friends. The 'G.P.' communicator, unlike Phinuit, was very realistic; he bore, Hodgson suggested, the same sort of relation to the real G.P. as a very good pen-and-ink sketch bears to a portrait in oils. He showed a most intimate knowledge of the affairs of the living G.P. and recognised and commented upon objects which had belonged to him. Out of 150 sitters who were introduced to him, G.P. recognised the thirty and only the thirty with whom the living Pellew had been acquainted. He appropriately adjusted the topics and the style of his conversation to each of these friends and often showed a close knowledge of their concerns. Only occasionally did the personation slip up badly; it did so, for instance, in a rather comic way when a sitter began to discuss with G.P. Chauncey Wright's views about 'Cosmical weather'. The point would have been well understood by the living G.P.

Sitter: Well, now that you have got into that world, George, have you got any new light upon the character of natural law? Do you now find that law is . . .

<sup>1</sup> See his 'A Further Record of Observations of Certain Phenomena of Trance', *P.S.P.R.* XIII (1898), pp. 284-582.



G.P. Yes, law is thought.

Sitter: Do you now find that law is permanent?

G.P. Cause is thought.

Sitter: That doesn't answer.

G.P. Ask it.

Sitter: Is law permanent, or is it only transitory result?

G.P. It is permanent.

Sitter: Then do you agree with Chauncey Wright?

G.P. And everlasting.

Sitter: Then do you agree with Chauncey Wright?

G.P. Most certainly on that point.

Another Sitter: What do you think of his views on cosmical weather?

G.P. He knows nothing, his theory is ludicrous.

Sitter: He just said he agreed with him. That was the point I was asking about, the permanency of law.<sup>1</sup>

The emergence of the G.P. communicator was accompanied by the development of another method of communication, that of automatic writing. Mrs. Piper had occasionally written in trance before, but the vast majority of communications during the Phinuit regime had been by voice. Writing had two advantages over speaking: a full record was automatically made; and a greater number of communicators found it possible to manipulate the hand than had been able to use the voice. Now that Phinuit could be by-passed there was a general betterment in the tone of the communications, and Phinuit himself improved. It was sometimes possible to obtain communications by voice and hand simultaneously. Persons talking to the communicator who used the hand had to speak to the hand and not to the ear!

G.P. remained the master of ceremonies on the 'other side' until early in 1897. Fortunately Hodgson had almost complete control over Mrs. Piper's sittings and sitters during the period 1892-7, and very full records were kept. However, G.P. too was gradually displaced. In 1895 there appeared a communicator claiming to be W. Stainton Moses. The next year Moses introduced controls who purported to be the members of the 'Imperator Band' which had inspired his own automatic writings (see above, p. 78). The Imperator Band gradually assumed charge of Mrs. Piper. Mrs. Piper had recently had a

<sup>1</sup> *P.S.P.R.* XV (1900), pp. 26-7.

serious operation, and the controls insisted that the numbers both of her seances and sitters should be kept down. The remainder of Mrs. Piper's career is of little concern to us. The Imperator Band were never able to establish their identities with the Imperator Band which had inspired Stainton Moses. Some people—especially Hodgson, but also James—were impressed by the Band's teachings; though the mistakes made in e.g. Biblical chronology or scientific fact are sometimes ludicrous. Hodgson's early death prevented him from completing a projected paper about this phase of Mrs. Piper's mediumship.

Nearly everyone who had extensive dealings with Mrs. Piper became convinced that she possessed supernormal powers; even Frank Podmore, the S.P.R.'s severest sceptic (who had not had extensive first-hand dealings with her), became so convinced. He gave his reasons in a paper which he read to the S.P.R. in March 1899.<sup>1</sup>

He compares the Piper case with that of other sensitives who had been famous in the past, and concludes that it is unique in the fullness of the records and the abundance of the material. 'Our choice now seems clearly defined between deliberate and systematic fraud on the one hand and supernormal faculty on the other.' But he felt that the arguments against fraud were overwhelming. Mrs. Piper had never once in almost thirteen years been detected in a dishonest action; nor had wind been got of the activities of any agents employed by her. And even apart from such considerations, the arrangements which had been made to preserve the anonymity of sitters and to ensure that Mrs. Piper could by no means obtain surreptitious information about them—arrangements made not just by Hodgson, but at various times by a number of other persons who had had charge of her—seemed to preclude the possibility of fraud. Nor was the information which Mrs. Piper's communicators commonly served up generally of a kind which seemed likely to have come from public records, servants, gravestones, and the like. Names came through only with difficulty; dates were rarely given exactly; material relating to different persons was hardly ever mixed up. In delineation of character Mrs. Piper far out-reached anything which could have been achieved as a result

<sup>1</sup> 'Discussion of the Trance-Phenomena of Mrs. Piper', *P.S.P.R.* XIV (1898), pp. 50-78.



of an agent's enquiries; successful communicators would commonly address sitters in exactly the right tone, and might refer to private and intimate matters, or to personal possessions of a trivial but significant kind.

Perhaps it is time to give some examples of the communications which thus impressed even the most hard-headed. Unfortunately it is quite impossible to give here anything like adequate examples of good and of indifferent communications, and it is certainly not possible to bring out their relative frequency.

The following is an example of Mrs. Piper (or Phinuit) in a successful vein. The sitting is dated 8th December 1893. The sitters (it was their first sitting) were the Rev. and Mrs. S. W. Sutton, who had lost their little daughter Katherine (Kakie) some six weeks previously. The note-taker was Mrs. Howard, a friend of Hodgson's and a very rapid writer. Mrs. Sutton's annotations are given in square brackets.

Mrs. Howard held Mrs. Piper's hands. She became immediately entranced under the control of Dr. Phinuit. After a brief communication to Mrs. Howard I took Mrs. Piper's hands and Phinuit said: This is a lovely lady,—she has done much good,—has helped so many poor souls. A little child is coming to you. This is the dearest lady I have met for a long time—the most light I have seen while in Mrs. Piper's body. He reaches out his hands as to a child, and says coaxingly: come here, dear. Don't be afraid. Come, darling, here is your mother. He describes the child and her 'lovely curls.' Where is Papa? Want papa. [He takes from the table a silver medal.] I want this—want to bite it. [She used to bite it.] [Reaches for a string of buttons.] Quick! I want to put them in my mouth. [The buttons also. To bite the buttons was forbidden. He exactly imitated her arch manner.] I will get her to talk to you in a minute. Who is Frank in the body? [We do not know.] [My uncle Frank had died a few years before. We were much attached. Possibly Phinuit was confused and my uncle was trying to communicate.] A lady is here who passed out of the body with tumour in the bowels. [My friend, Mrs. C., died of ovarian tumour.] She has the child—she is bringing it to me. Who is Dodo? [Her name for her brother George.] Speak to me quickly. I want you to call Dodo. Tell Dodo I am happy. Cry for me no more. [Puts hands to throat.] No sore throat any more. [She had pain and distress of the

throat and tongue.] Papa, speak to me. Can not you see me? I am not dead, I am living. I am happy with Grandma. [My mother had been dead many years.] Phinuit says: Here are two more. One, two, three here,—one older and one younger than Kakie. [Correct.] That is a boy, the one that came first. [Both were boys] . . .

The little one calls the lady, Auntie. [Not her aunt.] I wish you could see these children. Phinuit turns to Mr. Sutton and says: You do a great deal of good in the body. [To me] He is a dear man! Was this little one's tongue very dry? She keeps showing me her tongue. [Her tongue was paralysed, and she suffered much with it to the end.] Her name is Katherine. [Correct.] She calls herself Kakie. She passed out last. [Correct.] Tell Dodo Kakie is in a spiritual body. Where is horsey? [I gave him a little horse.] Big horsey, not this little one. [Probably refers to a toy cart-horse she used to like.] Dear Papa, take me wide. [To ride.] Do you miss your Kakie? Do you see Kakie? The pretty white flowers you put on me I have here. I took their little souls out and kept them with me. Phinuit describes lilies of the valley, which were the flowers we placed in her casket.

Papa, want to go wide horsey. [She plead this all through her illness.] Every day I go to see horsey. I like that horsey. I go to ride. I am with you every day. [We had just come from Mr. Sutton's parents, where we drove frequently, and I had seen Kakie with us. (This means that Mrs. Sutton had seen the 'apparition' of Kakie.—R. H.) Margaret (her sister) is still there driving daily.] [I asked if she remembered anything after she was brought downstairs.] I was so hot, my head was so hot. [Correct.] [I asked if she knew who was caring for her, if it was any comfort to have us with her.] Oh, yes,—oh, yes. [I asked if she suffered in dying.] I saw the light and followed it to this pretty lady. You will love me always? You will let me come to you at home. I will come to you every day, and I will put my hand on you, when you go to sleep. Do not cry for me,—that makes me sad. Eleanor. I want Eleanor. [Her little sister. She called her much during her last illness.] I want my buttons. Row, Row,—my song,—sing it now. I sing with you. [We sing, and a soft child voice sings with us.]

Lightly row, lightly row,  
O'er the merry waves we go,  
Smoothly glide, smoothly glide,  
With the ebbing tide.



[Phinuit hushes us, and Kakie finishes alone.]

Let the winds and waters be  
Mingled with our melody,  
Sing and float, sing and float,  
In our little boat.

Papa sing. I hear your voice, but it is so heavy. [Papa and Kakie sing. Phinuit exclaims: see her little curls fly!] [Her curls were not long enough to fly at death, six weeks before.] Kakie sings: Bye, bye, ba bye, bye, bye, O baby bye. Sing that with me, papa. [Papa and Kakie sing. These two songs were the ones she used to sing.] [She sang slight snatches of others in life not at the sitting.] Where is Dinah? I want Dinah. [Dinah was an old black rag-doll, not with us.] I want Bagie [her name for her sister Margaret]. I want Bagie to bring me my Dinah. I want to go to Bagie. I want Bagie. I see Bagie all the time. Tell Dodo when you see him that I love him. Dear Dodo. He used to march with me, he put me way up. [Correct.] Dodo did sing to me. That was a horrid body. I have a pretty body now. Tell Grandma I love her. I want her to know I live. Grandma does know it, Marmie—Great—grandma, Marmie. [We called her Great Grandmother *Marmie*, but *she* always called her *Grammie*. Both Grandmother and Great Grandmother were then living.]<sup>1</sup>

Of course thought-transference from the sitters (at least if one is satisfied that thought-transference occurs) is a very plausible explanation of such communications. But it cannot be the explanation of cases where, as in the example of 'Uncle Jerry' quoted above, information unknown to any of the sitters is given. Quite a number of such cases occurred in the English and other early sittings, and they were even more frequent during the G.P. period. A curious example is summarised as follows by Hodgson. The 'Madame Elisa' referred to was a lady, known in life both to Hodgson and to Myers; she had died some while before. 'F.' was her uncle, who survived her.

The notice of his ['F.'s] death was in a Boston morning paper, and I happened to see it on my way to the sitting. The first writing of the sitting came from Madame Elisa, without my expecting it. She wrote clearly and strongly, explaining that F. was there with her, but unable to speak directly, that she

<sup>1</sup> P.S.P.R. XIII (1897), pp. 485-6.

wished to give me an account of how she had helped F. to reach her. She said that she had been present at his death-bed, and had spoken to him, and she repeated what she had said, an unusual form of expression, and indicated that he had heard and recognised her. This was confirmed in detail in the only way possible at that time, by a very intimate friend of Madame Elisa and myself, and also of the nearest surviving relative of F. I showed my friend the account of the sitting, and to this friend, a day or two later, the relative, who was present at the death-bed, stated spontaneously that F. when dying said that he saw Madame Elisa who was speaking to him, and he repeated what she was saying. The expression so repeated, which the relative quoted to my friend, was that which I had received from Madame Elisa through Mrs. Piper's trance, when the death-bed incident was of course entirely unknown to me.<sup>1</sup>

It was no doubt the strain which such cases threw on the telepathic hypothesis that in part induced Hodgson to move over in his second paper on Mrs. Piper (written in 1897-8 after a long study of the G.P. case) to the view that the communicators were indeed the surviving spirits of deceased persons. But various other considerations also weighed heavily with him. These may be summarized as follows:<sup>2</sup>

1. The fragmentariness and disjointedness of many communications may reasonably be accounted for in terms of the difficulties which communicators might be expected to encounter in controlling the medium's organism. And the incompleteness and fragmentariness in question are of a kind which supports the spiritualistic rather than the telepathic hypothesis. For

2. The knowledge of sitters and their affairs displayed by communicating entities is characteristically limited; it is limited to the knowledge which the *communicators themselves* might be expected to possess. Accounting for this on the telepathic hypothesis would be very difficult; it would involve crediting the medium with a remarkable power of *selecting* from among the innumerable items of information about the sitters which she *could* have reached only those which in fact a given deceased person might be expected to possess.

3. Again, one communicator will be good, another bad, with

<sup>1</sup> P.S.P.R. XIII (1898), p. 378n.

<sup>2</sup> P.S.P.R. XIII (1898), pp. 351-406.



the same sitter; some communicators, like G.P., were uniformly, or almost uniformly, good with a great variety of sitters. This surely supports the spiritistic explanation. It can hardly be supposed that all G.P.'s friends just happened to be gifted telepathic agents.

4. More than this, there are not a few cases of communicators who first of all communicate in the presence of their friends and relatives, and later return at sittings when those friends and relatives are not present and deliver further, and appropriate, messages for them. This naturally weakens the force of the telepathic explanation; as also do the various cases of communicators who give correct but quite unexpected answers to sitters' questions.

5. Hodgson was also particularly impressed by cases of communications from suicides and from persons who had died in a state of mental distress. Such persons can, generally speaking, for some while after their deaths communicate only in a confused fashion; and this despite the presence as sitters of intimate friends whose knowledge of them the medium should be able to ransack by telepathy.

How far Hodgson, in addition to favouring some form of the spirit hypothesis, at this time actually accepted the teachings delivered by the spirits, I do not know. (Mrs. Piper's controls seem in the main to have expounded doctrines of a fairly orthodox Spiritualist kind.<sup>1</sup>) Hodgson came in the end to believe implicitly in the Imperator controls, and to mould his whole way of life on their teachings.

Hodgson read parts of his second paper on Mrs. Piper at a General Meeting of the S.P.R. on 11th March 1898. Sidgwick said in discussion that he was impressed by the evidence that Mrs. Piper possessed telepathic powers. But as for the spirit hypothesis 'he could not say more than that a *prima facie* case had been established for further investigation, keeping this hypothesis in view'.<sup>2</sup> He commented upon Phinuit's low moral tone and shiftiness, and thought that G.P. exhibited some of the same characteristics. G.P. resembled Phinuit also in desiring to appear to know more than he did; yet he exhibited the most lamentable lack of understanding of philosophy (of which the living G.P. had been a keen student). Hodgson replied that

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Sage, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-110.

<sup>2</sup> *J.S.P.R.* VIII (1898), p. 220.

other communicators referred to Phinuit's weaknesses without exhibiting them themselves. In regard to G.P.'s ignorance of philosophy Hodgson pointed out that 'the conditions of communication must be kept before the mind, and that if Professor Sidgwick were compelled to discourse philosophy through Mrs. Piper's organism, the result would be a very different thing from his lectures at Cambridge'.<sup>1</sup>

Views in part resembling Sidgwick's were developed at some length by Mrs. Sidgwick in a paper in the *S.P.R. Proceedings* for 1900<sup>2</sup> (a paper which she afterwards amplified to book length in *P.S.P.R.* XXVIII). In this paper she accepts, for the sake of argument, that the spirits of deceased persons are in some way involved in at least some of the communications, and asks the subsidiary question, is the actual communicating intelligence other than Mrs. Piper's? Hodgson, of course, had argued that deceased persons really could gain control of Mrs. Piper's organism. Mrs. Sidgwick came to the conclusion that departed spirits could influence Mrs. Piper's mind only telepathically, and that the 'communications' were hence of an indirect or mediated kind. She admitted that the communicating personalities often gave the impression of being quite distinct from Mrs. Piper; but this, she pointed out, can also hold true in cases of secondary personality. And in some ways the communicating personalities are apt to resemble secondary personalities—they are suggestible and given to childish rationalisations to cover up mistakes. They are indeed perhaps not as rounded and complete as some secondary personalities. They get involved in incoherences, prevarications and self-contradictions of a most awkward kind. They will not admit ignorance, but instead tell all sorts of complicated lies to back up or excuse their own *gaffes*. Phinuit is particularly bad in these respects, and it is quite clear that neither he nor the 'Imperator' group of controls can possibly be what they claim to be. Yet the most impressive control of all, G.P., the one for whose separate individuality there would seem to be the strongest evidence, guarantees the credentials of both Phinuit and the Imperator controls, and so stands or falls with them. And the moral and

<sup>1</sup> *J.S.P.R.* VIII (1898), p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> 'Discussion of the Trance Phenomena of Mrs. Piper', *P.S.P.R.* XV (1900), pp. 16-38.



intellectual standards of the communicators are frequently well below those which they had when alive. The instance of G.P.'s confusion over 'cosmical weather' has already been quoted. Another example is the *soi-disant* George Eliot who claimed that she had met in the next world Chaucer, the only and original author of the *Canterbury Tales*, a Bacon who said he was Shakespeare, and Adam Bede. Mrs. Piper's own personality crops out in many places, and can be seen in the communicators' interests in clothes and hats, and in their ignorance of science—one communicator said that the etheric body was made of 'vacuum'.

I have cited Mrs. Sidgwick's paper at length, not because I feel that the controversy between her and Hodgson is important or even capable of solution, but in order to provide further examples of Mrs. Piper at her worst to set against the more favourable examples cited before.<sup>1</sup> However, something which sitters frequently insisted upon should perhaps also be borne in mind, namely that very often no printed record of a sitting can possibly convey a proper idea of the verisimilitude of Mrs. Piper's personation. To the recipient of the messages the very manner in which they were delivered might convey a certainty which could neither be resisted nor yet communicated.

It was not until 1898 that in Mrs. Edmond Thompson, the wife of a prosperous merchant, a trance medium was found in England whose powers seemed at all comparable to Mrs. Piper's, and who was prepared to submit to prolonged investigation in the same way. Mrs. Thompson's mediumship had begun in 1897, when she was aged twenty-nine, and accounts of its early development may be found in *Light* for that and the following year (she is there known as 'Mrs. T.'). Her chief 'control' was Nelly, a deceased daughter. Her early phenomena were often physical—raps, lights, occasional 'apports', movements and even levitations of chairs and tables, and the billowing of curtains in true Eusapian style. She even supposedly materialised spirit hands and spirit drapery; these were however for the

<sup>1</sup> See also the rather querulous 'Discussion of the Trance Phenomena of Mrs. Piper' by A. Lang, *P.S.P.R.* XV (1900), pp. 39-52; and, for some examples of wholly hostile (but also often wholly erroneous) criticism, Appendix B, below.

most part heard and felt rather than seen. Mrs. Thompson was not, at any time, paid for her services.

The reports about Mrs. Thompson in *Light* attracted Myers' attention, and on 2nd September 1898 he went by arrangement to call upon her. He was much impressed by the apparent sincerity and candour of Mr. and Mrs. Thompson, and he struck up a close friendship with them. He was able to exercise over Mrs. Thompson's sittings the sort of complete control which Hodgson had had over Mrs. Piper's. He had himself upwards of 150 sittings with her, the records of which have unfortunately disappeared, and during the period 1898-1900 he introduced a fair range of other sitters, mostly anonymously.

Under Myers' influence Mrs. Thompson ceased to try for physical phenomena (that Myers should wish to steer clear of them was quite understandable in view of his brushes with Hodgson). However, the other modes in which she might obtain 'messages' were quite numerous; in this respect she somewhat resembled Miss Wingfield. She might see pictures or writing in a crystal or on a wall, or even see spirits standing in the room with her. She wrote automatically, both in trance and in a waking state. Most commonly however communications through her were by voice. Her chief control, Nelly, generally relayed (as Phinuit had done) information and messages from deceased persons whom she said she had with her; and she often gave information about the supposed present activities and whereabouts of living friends or relations of the communicator or of the sitters. Only rarely did a communicator other than Nelly control Mrs. Thompson directly.

Much the longest, and seemingly much the most successful, series of sittings was Myers' own; it convinced him completely that he was at last in touch with Annie Marshall. Unfortunately he did not live to write an account of them. A number of sitters did however write accounts of their sittings, and these were printed in the *Proceedings* of the S.P.R. for June 1902.

The most interesting sittings were perhaps the seven had by a Dutchman, Dr. F. van Eeden, during two visits to England in 1899 and 1900. At his early visits (his name being, of course, kept from Mrs. Thompson) he received from Nelly a good deal of detailed and accurate information about his family and background in Holland; so accurate was some of this information



be in rapport. There is also some suggestion that the clairvoyant faculty is at its keenest when the percipient is in a coma or a trance or even dangerously ill. Now the S.P.R. had amongst its records a few, a very few, first-hand accounts of 'reciprocal' cases; cases, that is, in which a person who imagines himself to be viewing (as if from an appropriate point of view) some distant scene, had in fact been perceived at that scene by a person present there. As Myers expressed it: 'Correspondently with clairvoyant perception there may be phantasmogenetic efficiency.'<sup>1</sup> It would of course be possible to explain many such cases in terms of reciprocal telepathy; but Myers preferred to put a different interpretation upon them:

I treat the respective hallucinations of each member of the affected group as each and all directly generated by a conception in a distant mind—a conception which presents itself to that mind as though its centre of activity were translated to the scene where the group are sitting, and which presents itself to each member of that group as though their hallucinations did not come to them incoherently or independently, but were diffused from a 'radiant point,' or phantasmogenetic focus, corresponding with that region of space where the distant agent conceives himself to be exercising his supernormal perception.<sup>2</sup>

Myers thinks that what happens in collective crisis cases is that the dying man's conception of himself as at a certain scene or with a particular person presents itself in a fully externalised fashion to persons who are present at the scene in question, and who are endowed with a certain idiosyncratic sensitivity. That it actually is the dying man's conception of himself that in some obscure way *externalises* itself at a particular point in space is suggested by various considerations. For instance the details of an apparition's appearance, its clothing etc., are almost always such as *could* have originated from the dying man; and are sometimes such as *must* have come from him (for instance when the apparition wears clothes which the percipient did not know the agent possessed). Again the fact that there are various cases of purely *local* apparitions rather suggests that a percipient may simply witness a phantasm generated by causes external to himself. It may be that it is to reciprocal cases that we should

<sup>1</sup> *Phantasms* II, p. 289.

<sup>2</sup> *Phantasms* II, p. 291.

turn for a fuller understanding of how a man's conception of himself may be externalised in these ways.

In a letter to William James of 16th January 1887, Gurney said of Myers' theory: 'Myers's note seems to me a hopeless attempt to present a frankly material view of ghosts with elimination of the material element, & I don't see how my objections to it . . . Vol II pp 269-70 can be answered.' But Gurney's own theory is so complex and invokes so many unknowns (such as 'rapport' between percipients, and the 'channeling' of the agent's telepathic message through percipient B to percipient C) that one wonders whether the ingenuity he devotes to expounding it might not have been equally well employed in dismissing the phenomena, or at any rate collective apparitions, altogether. Nor is it clear (at least to me) how his blending of two totally unsatisfactory kinds of telepathic theory can produce a satisfactory one. However, Gurney was himself fully aware of the difficulties. The letter to William James, quoted above, goes on:

But I am not happy as to my own view. All I would say is that one must use the words & ideas that already exist; and that the phenomenon of collective percipience is *more like* what we call hallucination than what we call perception of the external world. But I cannot help supposing that the *community* of percipience implies objectivity, of a sort, of whose basis & limits we know nothing.

In this decidedly unsatisfactory state theorising about crisis and collective cases has rested ever since; the phenomena remain as puzzling as ever.

*Phantasms of the Living* was published in October 1886; it had been delayed for some months by a fire at the printers'. It did not at first attract a great deal of notice from the world at large. The *Westminster* gave it a reasonable notice, *Mind* a short but polite one. *The Times* devoted a leader to it on 30th October. Several reviews attempted to be humorous, with a marked lack of success. However, the following year a number of extended attacks on it appeared. The one which attracted most attention in this country was A. T. Innes' 'Where are the Letters?' in *The Nineteenth Century* for August 1887. Innes remarked that



*Phantasms* provides us with plenty of good evidence about the deaths involved in the crisis cases. But 'the real question is on the other side, What evidence do the editors adduce that the "percipients" at a distance felt or perceived at the time what they now tell the editors they did?' The most conclusive kind of evidence would be a contemporary letter of the percipient's describing his experience, and immediately posted to a third party. Of much less value, though still not valueless, would be a contemporary memorandum retained by the percipient.

To despatch a letter or to make such a memorandum would be a natural thing for the percipient of an apparition to do, and indeed many percipients (some forty of them) allege that they in fact wrote such documents. None the less, the authors of *Phantasms* have not seen the crucial letter in a single case; and they have seen memoranda only in nine cases. Even these memoranda are in most instances either too brief to be of service, or else not quoted verbatim by the authors.

Now we cannot expect that percipients will always write letters or make memoranda about their experiences, though we should expect them to do so in many cases. But where a percipient claims that he did indeed write such a letter or make such a memorandum, or where it seems very likely that he would have written or made one, and where he now states that the letter or memorandum concerned has been lost or destroyed, we have good grounds for suspicion. People simply would not lose or destroy such letters or memoranda—rather they would preserve them carefully. Yet cases in which contemporary documents have allegedly been lost or destroyed figure amongst those to which the authors of *Phantasms* attach most weight.

In his reply Gurney, as well as disagreeing with Innes' treatment of various individual cases, suggested that his arguments were based upon three false assumptions.

(a) *That the percipients of apparitions would immediately write letters describing their experiences.* What of their very probable fear of being thought superstitious, and of the likelihood that they have no confidential correspondents?

(b) *That if such letters were written they would be preserved.* After all, most people have never given thought to the problems of telepathy, and could not be expected to see the importance of preserving evidence. Why should they retain a letter or memo-

randum once they had verified the coincidence to their own satisfaction? And the cases in which memoranda *have* been preserved can hardly just be set aside as Innes sets them aside, unless we are prepared to regard them all as instances of fraud.

(c) *That a flaw in a record in respect of a detail at once vitiates the whole thing.* 'Our experience of human testimony does not support the sweeping assertion that a narrative must be substantially and fundamentally false, because it has followed a certain common and natural law of growth in respect of details inessential to its central incidents.'

I am myself inclined to think that Gurney's view of human nature is, so far as the preservation of records is concerned, a truer one than Innes'. After all, Gurney could back his assertions with the experience he had gained in the course of interviewing and corresponding with hundreds of percipients.

Very much less courteous than Innes' article was a critique of *Phantasms* by the American philosopher C. S. Peirce which appeared the following December in the *Proceedings* of the American S.P.R. Peirce suggested, in tones which did not hide a consciousness of superior wisdom, that each single one of the visual crisis cases published in *Phantasms* violated one or more of the eighteen conditions which they should have fulfilled to be acceptable as evidence. Among those conditions were: that the percipient should not have had any other hallucination than the one concerned; that he should have been in good health; that he should not have been suffering from anxiety; that his testimony should not be loose or inaccurate; that he should have confided the story to a third party before news of the agent's death arrived; that the apparition should have been clearly and immediately recognised; and that it should undoubtedly have occurred within the twelve-hour limit. Unfortunately Peirce's study of the cases in question had not been sufficiently careful, and Gurney was able to point out in his reply that Peirce had time and again misunderstood, misrepresented and even misquoted them. Peirce's rejoinder was lengthy and querulous, and Gurney was able to deal with it much as before. None the less Peirce did light upon two serious objections to Gurney's arguments against the theory of chance coincidence. The first objection was that people are more likely to forget hallucinations which do not coincide with deaths than hallucinations



which do; this would of course have meant that the odds against the thirty-two coincidental cases in *Phantasms* being the results of chance-coincidence were much less than Gurney had suggested. The second of Peirce's objections was that in assessing at 300,000 the number of people likely to have come within range of the Literary Committee's appeals for cases Gurney was very considerably underestimating the extent to which stories of apparitions get around. Gurney's figure had been based largely upon the circulation of the periodicals in which notices had appeared; but of course anyone at all who had seen a ghost might well have told the story to one of several friends each of whom might have seen the appeal and mentioned it to him.

It was, on the data then available, quite impossible to say quite definitely that Peirce was wrong on these points, though Gurney contested them in various ways. But a few years later the 'Census of Hallucinations' drew the sting from both of Peirce's arguments.<sup>1</sup>

The last of Gurney's replies to Peirce was published posthumously, and was completed by a note from Myers. Gurney himself had died in a Brighton hotel, alone and tragically, on 23rd June 1888, seemingly of an overdose of chloroform. His death at the early age of forty-one was perhaps the greatest single blow that psychical research has ever suffered; and it was not, I think, a light one to psychology in general. His work in psychical research had come to absorb him completely, and he was in many ways uniquely gifted for it. He was deeply versed in relevant literature of all kinds—psychological, physiological, philosophical, mesmeric—and when the working fit was upon him his industry was prodigious. The powers of analysis and classification which he displayed in handling the enormous mass of refractory material comprised in *Phantasms of the Living* are of the highest order, and his powers of theorising and of perceiving fresh avenues of investigation did not lag behind. In controversy he was at his best, relishing the stimulus, conscious of his powers, master of the facts. He was always polite and frequently humorous, and his cool intelligence usually enabled

<sup>1</sup> See below, pp. 182–5.

him to cut just that much deeper than his opponent. No one however could have been more prompt in acknowledging mistakes. To William James he wrote on 31st March 1885:

I think our case is *really* strong enough to show that the subject ought to be earnestly prosecuted, & it is a great mistake to discount the result by the slightest exaggeration of its strength. I feel that every sentence written on these matters ought absolutely to *reek* with candour.

It has sometimes been suggested, and most especially by Mr. Trevor Hall, that Gurney was so naïve a person, and himself so absolutely honest, that he was incapable of supposing others likely to deceive him, and was hence liable to be taken in by charlatans. And it is indeed true that his belief in the goodness and the good faith of his friends was unfailing. But he was well acquainted with divers kinds of Spiritualistic frauds and with all sorts of possible sources of mistaken testimony and of experimental error, and I can detect no signs of excess credulity in *Phantasms* or in his other writings. 'That Gurney was credulous and easily imposed upon,' observed Andrew Lang, 'those who knew him, and knew his penetrating humour, cannot admit; nor is the theory likely to be maintained by those whom bias does not prevent from studying with care his writings.'<sup>1</sup>

Gurney's intellectual gifts will be obvious to anyone who gives serious attention just to *Phantasms of the Living*; but his personality remains a little obscure. His many friends liked and admired him intensely, not just for his brilliant conversation and his intellectual gifts, but for his humour, his kindliness, the penetration with which he would divine their troubles, the sympathy with which he would share in them. Jane Harrison recollected him as perhaps 'the most lovable and beautiful human being I ever met'.<sup>2</sup> During a visit to Cambridge in May 1873 George Eliot was so struck with his good looks that for several days she could think of nothing else, and 'she afterwards discovered that his mind was as beautiful as his face'.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edn., Cambridge, 1911, s.v. 'Gurney, Edmund'.

<sup>2</sup> Jane Harrison, *Reminiscences of a Student's Life*, London, 1925, p. 55.

<sup>3</sup> O. Browning, *Life of George Eliot*, London, 1890, p. 116. The famous occasion on which George Eliot walked with Myers in the Fellows' Garden at Trinity (see Myers' *Essays Modern*, pp. 268–9) seems to have been in May or June 1877. See *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. G. S. Haight, London, 1954, VI, p. 380. George Eliot is said to have founded the character of Daniel Deronda in part on Gurney. In



'Nothing was wanting,' said Myers in an unpublished fragment of autobiography, 'from the deep earnest loving utterances—ingots from the treasure-house of his heart;—to the ironic mockery which places one outside a trouble, and shows flashingly its transitoriness in the sum of things.'

On the other hand some people seem to have found Gurney cold and aloof, and his conversation, however brilliant, impersonal and sarcastic. Even those who genuinely liked and admired him were sometimes disconcerted by his manner. Lady Battersea noted in her diary for 2nd September 1881: 'Mr. Gurney talks too much of humanity really to care for it.'<sup>1</sup> Myers, in a letter to his wife dated 5th July 1884, mentions: '... a moonlight walk with the Coon [sc. Gurney] who feels sadly that he does not get people to feel how much he cares for them and sympathises with them,—owing to something in his manner which they think sarcastic'. Perhaps the answer may be that only highly educated and perceptive persons could even begin to appreciate Gurney. If one could neither grasp the nature of his intellectual perplexities nor sense the despair which they too often occasioned him, one might well suspect that his continual talk about the human predicament was a pose, and take literally the mockery and self-mockery with which he would partially hide his feelings.

Those who understood Gurney found him a most lovable person; and in their affection, and in a sense of common endeavour with them in some worthwhile undertaking, he found the chief source of the little happiness which life brought him. In December 1887 he wrote to Myers:

Your letter was an *immense* comfort. I had divined that you had also been at a low water mark in another way. I am glad *you* can do, what I believe *no one* else could do,—perceive how little my appearance of agnostic & gloomy isolation answers to my real inside. The difference between us is that I cannot *make*

this connection an entry in the diaries of Lady Battersea (wife of Cyril Flower, later Lord Battersea, a College friend of Myers') for 3rd June 1879 may be of interest. 'Mr. Gurney is a fine, good creature. We talked of George Eliot and of Daniel Deronda. Mr. G. thinks it the most remarkable of her works, as it contains a grand idea: How one fine nature can become the salvation of a narrow egotistical one, how it can open the gates of heaven to a poor *earth bound* soul' (B.M. Add. MS. 47932).

<sup>1</sup> B.M. Add. MS. 47934.

*definite* the issues which—could we know them—might reconcile us to our fates. Meanwhile the *one* thing I can cleave to is the sense of union in the depths—& in the heights if there are any.

Gurney would not, I think, have been a happy man in any age, and his nature and the circumstances of his death made some people fear or suspect that he might have committed suicide. According to his daughter's account of what her mother told her, Gurney received on the Thursday before his death a letter asking him to go to Brighton.<sup>1</sup> He left for Brighton on the Friday. On the afternoon of the following day, Saturday, 23rd June, the door of his room in the Royal Albion Hotel was found to be still locked, and was broken in. Gurney was dead in his bed. He lay on his left side, his right hand holding over his nose and mouth some cotton wool covered by a sponge bag. A small empty bottle stood nearby.

An inquest was held on the Monday. A slight suggestion of suicide was raised, but it was overborne by other testimony. Gurney's brother Alfred, vicar of St. Barnabas, Pimlico, and author of various devotional works, stated that Gurney had been accustomed to use narcotics to relieve persistent neuralgia and insomnia. Myers' brother Arthur, a physician and an old friend of Gurney's, testified similarly, and added that he had often discussed with Gurney the use of chloroform as an analgesic or narcotic, but had no certain knowledge that he had ever tried it.<sup>2</sup> Evidence was produced that shortly before his

<sup>1</sup> Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 1–26, suggests that Arthur and Frederic Myers, together presumably with the Rev. Alfred Gurney, conspired to invent the story about the neuralgia to deceive the jury into recording a verdict of death by misadventure. No doubt they would have done their best, both for Gurney's sake and the S.P.R.'s, to present a favourable picture to the court; but the supposition that a respectable physician and a clergyman of high repute and outstanding piety would conspire together to commit perjury in this way seems to me quite fantastic. I have commented on Mr. Hall's arguments, *J.S.P.R.* XLIII (1965), pp. 57–9. That Gurney did in fact suffer from neuralgia is, as Broad remarks (*loc. cit.*), at least strongly suggested by some passages in *Tertium Quid*. 'Even the most confident view of the desirability of mundane existence may be considerably modified in the course of a night's neuralgia' (I, p. 33); 'To any person who would choose . . . that all the human race should suffer this night from face-ache, rather than that one . . . should pass it on the rack, the distinction is essential' (I, pp. 181–2). 'Thus anyone might fairly choose that B should have a very bad face-ache sooner than that a thousand other people should have a rather bad one' (I, p. 185). In one of his letters to William James, Gurney remarks that he was once much troubled by insomnia, and in another he describes a visit to a dentist and some experiences



death Gurney had been actively planning his future, and the jury returned a verdict of 'accidentally suffocated by an overdose of chloroform taken probably for the relief of pain'.

None the less, some people had doubts. Henry James wrote to William James on 26th June 1888<sup>1</sup> that 'suicide is *suspected* I gather—from the strangeness of the form of his death. But he was only *generally* unhappy, and was even "cheerful" up to the last. Therefore it seems improbable.' Sidgwick confessed in his Journal that he had 'painful doubts'. At least one member of the Sidgwick circle seems to have become convinced that Gurney's death was suicidal. The 'third case C.', whom Richard Hodgson cites (*P.S.P.R.* XIII, p. 350) among his instances of communicators supposedly confused because their 'passings' had been suicidal, was in fact Gurney (as may be seen by comparing the passage with *P.S.P.R.* XXVIII, p. 303). However, it appears from a letter written by Mrs. Sidgwick to Sir Oliver Lodge on 25th July 1915<sup>2</sup> that Hodgson's belief probably originated from his hearing something of the contents of some extremely private 'communications' which a *soi-disant* Gurney gave to Myers and Lodge in 1889 and 1890 through the American medium, Mrs. Piper.<sup>3</sup> Since Mrs. Sidgwick says she

under nitrous oxide. Arthur Myers wrote a long letter to his brother Frederic on the day of the Inquest, and I can find no hint of any conspiracy in it.

<sup>1</sup> Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Sidgwick's own views on Gurney's death do not appear very clearly from the letter. She says: 'Re Gurney—I cannot of course mention the possibility of suicide [in her forthcoming paper on Mrs. Piper] and cannot therefore say what I feel hardly any doubt is the real explanation of the "balled-up"-ness in America namely that Hodgson had made up his mind by the time Mrs. P. returned to America that it was suicide and had a theory that suicides were confused for a long time after death. He discusses this theory in his second report Vol. XIII, p. 350 and compare p. 377. "The third case C." was Gurney [footnote omitted] (as by the way it will be possible for a detective to discover after my paper is published, for I quote the sentence at the end of the paragraph on p. 350. However it is most unlikely that anyone will put two and two together and it would not much matter perhaps if they did).

'Hodgson must have known what you said about Gurney in Vol. VI as soon as that was published (1890 or 91) but I do not know how much more he knew. It is very unlikely that anyone wrote to him about the evidential communications, they were so extremely private. None of us ever saw the records I think unless it was Myers. When Hodgson's second report was published he evidently knew something, but where he learnt it I do not know. It might have been told him while the proofs were being revised.'

<sup>3</sup> See *P.S.P.R.* VI, pp. 493, 516, 524, 552, 645; XXIII, pp. 140-62; XXVIII, pp. 300-5.

thinks that only Myers saw the seance records, it seems *possible* that it was from Myers that Hodgson received the information concerned.<sup>1</sup> But the relevant parts of the records were destroyed, and one can hardly even contemplate attaching any weight to secondhand accounts of evidence from beyond the grave; except perhaps in so far as the reception of that evidence shows that some of those who were well acquainted with Gurney and with his circumstances did not find it inconceivable that he might have committed suicide.

Could something have happened to Gurney on 22nd June 1888 to precipitate a particularly severe attack of depression? Mr. Trevor Hall has lately suggested that it might have done.<sup>2</sup> In 1882 and 1883 Gurney and Myers had conducted in Brighton and London some experiments in the telepathic transference of drawings and other material. The subjects were G. A. Smith, a young Brightonian, and Douglas Blackburn, a local journalist. The experiments were seemingly successful. Smith was a talented young man and was, *inter alia*, a very gifted hypnotist (he had been giving stage demonstrations of hypnosis and thought-reading). After the experiments Gurney employed Smith as a secretary, and his hypnotic abilities proved very useful in subsequent experimental work. Smith acted as hypnotist both in straightforward hypnotic experiments, and in experiments in telepathy under hypnosis; he continued to help with such experiments for several years after Gurney's death (see Appendix A). Many years later, in 1908 and again in 1911, Blackburn confessed in print<sup>3</sup> that he and Smith (who was now doing well in the new field of cine-photography) had deceived Gurney and Myers in 1882 and 1883 by the successful operation of a code. Smith strongly denied the charge. None the less Mr. Hall thinks it probable that Smith deceived Gurney not merely in 1882-3, but also in the later experiments; he often provided subjects for them from among his own acquaintances at Brighton. Now at the time of Gurney's death, Smith was away on his honeymoon, and this makes Gurney's visit to Brighton

<sup>1</sup> Myers, however, wrote to William James on 28th Feb. 1890 that the principal secret revealed by the Gurney communicator was 'nothing about his *death*, nor about his *wife*—but a matter wh. cd. not be guessed at, rightly or wrongly'. But more than one 'secret' seems to have been revealed.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 174-99.

<sup>3</sup> In *John Bull*, Dec. 1908 and Jan. 1909; and the *Daily News*, 1st Sept. 1911.



hard to explain, for he usually went down there to carry out experiments with Smith's assistance. Mr. Hall suggests that during Smith's absence someone (perhaps his sister) anxious to extricate him from his life of deception, wrote to Gurney and, upon his arrival at Brighton, presented him with complete evidence of Smith's duplicity. Gurney had recently been upset by Innes' and Peirce's criticisms of *Phantasms* (Mr. Hall believes that these were shattering), and by the detection in fraud of the Creery sisters, the experiments with whom had figured prominently in *Phantasms*. The unmasking of Smith finally brought home to Gurney the fact that all his work lay in ruins and, in despair, he chloroformed himself.

There is however no reason for scenting a mystery in the fact that Gurney paid a visit to Brighton without Smith. It has lately been pointed out that Gurney had recently become interested in a haunted house there.<sup>1</sup> He had interviewed the chief witness, apparently at Brighton, on 13th June 1888,<sup>2</sup> the very day on which Smith was married at Ramsgate. It is of course at least conceivable that Gurney made away with himself in a sudden fit of depression occasioned by learning something about Smith, perhaps from an accidental meeting with one of their subjects. But there are some obvious objections. It is very difficult to see why Mr. Hall thinks the discovery of Smith's duplicity would have been the complete ruination of Gurney's work; many of his most interesting hypnotic experiments did not depend in any way on Smith's integrity; and his main work, *Phantasms of the Living*, was, I venture to think, very little damaged by Innes and Peirce, and in Gurney's eyes hardly damaged at all.

Again it seems very odd that Smith should have risked a comfortable berth by continued cheating (if indeed he had cheated in the first place);<sup>3</sup> experiments in telepathy were only

<sup>1</sup> See *P.S.P.R.* VI (1889), pp. 256-70.

<sup>2</sup> *P.S.P.R.* VI, p. 264. Gurney may have stayed at Brighton for some days. *The Brighton Gazette and Fashionable Visitors List* for Thursday, 14th June 1888, says that a 'Mr. Gurney' had arrived at 56 Middle Street, presumably a lodging-house. But the name Gurney is too common for one to be sure that it was Edmund. Gurney's memorandum of his visit of 13th June is headed '18 Prestonville Road'. It is preserved in the S.P.R. archives.

<sup>3</sup> Blackburn's career and character are obscure, but they do not seem to have

a small part of his duties, and it is extremely unlikely that his livelihood in any way depended on his obtaining positive results. He was often employed by the S.P.R. to investigate mediums and haunted houses, and his reports are generally quite level-headed.<sup>1</sup> There are however two definite hints that he may have practised deception in the later experiments in which he was involved.<sup>2</sup> The first is an entry in Sidgwick's *Journal* for 5th July 1885, concerning experiments at Brighton for which Smith was the hypnotist-agent and a lad named Conway the subject-percipient. Sidgwick fancied that Smith might have given Conway hints by slight sounds: but Gurney was absolutely convinced of Smith's honesty. The second is the following extract from a letter of Myers to his wife, dated 6th April 1891: 'I have had a long talk about *Brighton* [where Smith had been acting as hypnotist for some experiments on telepathy under hypnosis] at Hillside. Mrs. Sidgwick will go very soon, meantime *nothing is to be said to anyone* about suspicious circumstances. Most important that *nothing* should leak out—you won't tell *Arthur* or *anyone*, I am sure.' But in both these cases the suspicions aroused seem to have been allayed.

If Gurney indeed committed suicide as a result of learning that Smith had been deceiving him, it would not, I am sure, have been because he felt his work had been destroyed, but for a personal reason—that Smith had now become a close friend. Something of the relation between the two may perhaps be gathered from a letter which Gurney wrote to William James on 16th April 1886:

Smith's *bona fides* is quite beyond all doubt to anyone who knows him. I know him, I believe, quite completely. He has been acting as my private secretary for more than a year—with me for hours a day, & I believe I know his character as well as, say, you have known that of any one of your pupils. He has been my pupil in a sense. He is blameless & acute, perfectly steady and self-respecting, devoted to the work, & excellent at tracing impostures.

been such as to inspire complete confidence in his 'confessions', see *J.S.P.R.* XLIII (1965), pp. 222-3.

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. *J.S.P.R.* I (1885), pp. 313-17; *P.S.P.R.* XI (1895), pp. 225-8.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Hall's criticisms of these experiments, *op. cit.*, pp. 159-68, have themselves been subjected to criticism.



## APPENDIX A: EARLY EXPERIMENTS ON THOUGHT- TRANSFERENCE PUBLISHED BY THE S.P.R.

More extended résumés of the early experiments on thought-transference than that given below will be found in *Phantasms* I, pp. 10-85, *Human Personality* I, pp. 524-43, 598-635, and in F. Podmore's *Apparitions and Thought-transference*, London, 1894, pp. 1-142.

1. *Experiments with the Creery Family* (*P.S.P.R.* I (1882), pp. 19-30, 71-8). The first subjects with whom members of the S.P.R. conducted extended and seemingly successful experiments on thought-transference were the family of the Rev. A. M. Creery, of Buxton. The percipients were various of Mr. Creery's five daughters, acting singly. The agents generally acted in a group, and at various times included Mr. Creery himself, members of his family, Barrett, Professor Balfour Stewart (the S.P.R.'s second President), Professor Alfred Hopkinson, Gurney, Myers, and other members of the thought-transference committee. The usual procedure was as follows. The daughter who was to act as percipient would leave the room, whilst the group of agents selected a target. This would be written down rather than spoken. The girl would be called in, and the company would concentrate on the target. Targets might be a name chosen at random, an object from the house, a two-figure number, or a playing card out of a full pack.

The girls achieved some startling successes, even when members of their family were not among the agents. They succeeded not merely in their father's home (where the first experiments were carried out in 1881-2), but at Cambridge (July to August 1882) and Dublin (November 1882). For instance at Cambridge they between them guessed correctly 17 out of 216 playing cards; and at Dublin 32 out of 108.

Their ability began to wane in 1882; and in some further experiments (see *P.S.P.R.* V (1888), pp. 269-70) two of them were detected in the use of a rather weak code. Though of course it could

## APPENDIX A: EARLY EXPERIMENTS

have been effective only when one of the sisters was amongst the agents.

### 2. *Experiments in the Transference of Pictures and Diagrams.*

(a) *The Smith-Blackburn Experiments* (*P.S.P.R.* I (1882-3), pp. 78-97, 161-7, 181-216). Three series of experiments (December 1882, January 1883, April 1883) for which Douglas Blackburn acted as agent and G. A. Smith as percipient (on Smith and Blackburn, see pp. 179-81 above). The experimenters were Myers, Gurney, and other members of the thought-transference committee. In the early experiments agent and percipient were allowed to touch each other, and in the later series they were in the same room at the time of 'transmission'. Target items included colours, names and numbers; but the successes in the reproduction of target drawings and diagrams were particularly striking.

These experiments were heavily criticised (*Proceedings* of the American S.P.R. I, p. 315) on the grounds that the results could have been obtained by the use of a code. Many years later, in 1908 and 1911, Blackburn confessed that the results *had* been obtained by a code; but Smith vigorously denied it. See T. H. Hall, *The Strange Case of Edmund Gurney*, pp. 137-49. However, neither Blackburn's confessions nor the experiments in which he participated can be readily accepted; cf. p. 180n above.

(b) *The Guthrie Experiments* (*P.S.P.R.* II (1883), pp. 24-42). The percipients were two employees of Mr. Guthrie's, Miss Relph and Miss Edwards. The agents included Mr. Guthrie and various other persons of repute from the Liverpool district; also Gurney. A drawing would be prepared in a room apart, and then brought into the room where the blindfolded percipient sat. It would then be placed on a wooden stand where the percipient could not have seen it even had she not been blindfolded. The agent, or agents, would then look at it until the percipient indicated that she was ready to try to reproduce it. A number of very striking successes were obtained. The percipients' abilities later began to wane.

(c) *The Lodge Experiments* (*P.S.P.R.* II (1884), pp. 189-200). A continuation, with positive results, of the preceding experiments. Lodge, then professor of physics at Liverpool University, simply assumed charge of the experiments for a while. He noted that very often the idea of the object depicted in the target drawing was conveyed, rather than its geometrical outline.



(d) *Further Experiments in the Reproduction of Drawings by Various Other Experimenters* are summarised in *Human Personality* I, pp. 614-636. See also the references p. 601n, and Podmore, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-57. I do not think that any of them could be said to be *better* than the Guthrie experiments, and there does not seem to be any point in giving details of them here.

### 3. *Experiments in the Telepathic Production of 'Automatic' Movements.*

(a) *Experiments of the Rev. P. H. Newnham* (*P.S.P.R.* III (1885), pp. 7-25). These experiments were carried out in 1871. Mr. Newnham's wife had developed the faculty of writing automatically with a 'planchette' board. Mr. Newnham would sit in the room with his wife, but in a position where she could not observe his face or notebook. He would then write down a question to be answered by the planchette board without however speaking the question aloud, or otherwise acquainting his wife with its nature. A series of 309 questions and answers (on very diverse subjects) was thus obtained. The answers were in almost all cases unmistakably appropriate to the questions. The intelligence operating the board did not claim to be separate from Mrs. Newnham; none the less answers totally unexpected by both her and her husband were on a number of occasions given; and sometimes knowledge seemingly in excess of hers was displayed.

(b) *Experiments of Professor Charles Richet* (*P.S.P.R.* III (1885), pp. 7-25; VIII (1892), pp. 138-48). These seem to me to be in some ways the most interesting of the early experiments. The set-up was complex. At a small table sat two persons, A and B, with the alphabet laid out in front of them. A passed a pointer continually over the alphabet. B noted down the letter over which the pointer was each time he heard a bell ring. The bell was rung automatically whenever another table in the room, at which sat three other persons, C, D and E, was tilted. C, D and E had their hands on the table in the ordinary 'table-tilting' fashion; they were so seated that they could not see the activities of A and B. A sixth person, F (usually Richet), sat apart from both groups, concentrating on a name (obtained randomly from a reference book). The letters spelled out in many cases closely followed the letters of the name on which F was concentrating. It was easy to show that the coincidences between the letters spelled out and the letters of the name greatly exceeded chance. Yet C, D and E did not know what they were spelling out, and A and B, who knew what C, D and E were spelling out, did not know the target.

### 4. *Experiments in Thought-transference under Hypnosis.*

(a) *Experiments in the Telepathic Anaesthetisation of a selected Finger of a Hypnotised Subject* (*P.S.P.R.* I (1883), pp. 257-60; II (1884), pp. 201-5; III (1885), pp. 457-9; V (1889), pp. 14-17; VIII (1892), pp. 577-93). The hypnotist in all these experiments was G. A. Smith. The experimenter in all except the last (conducted by Mrs. Sidgwick) was Gurney. The subject thrust his hands through a screen, and spread the fingers wide. The experimenter selected a finger, and Smith would point (or in later experiments merely look) at it. The finger would (in accordance with instructions previously given to the subject) become rigid and anaesthetic. There is at least no doubt that the anaesthesia was genuine—the fingers were subjected to severe electric shocks and to stabs.

(b) *Experiments in the Transference of Two-figure Numbers under Hypnosis* (*P.S.P.R.* VI (1889), pp. 128-70; VIII (1892), pp. 536-596). The principal experimenter in both these series of experiments (1889, and 1890-1) was Mrs. Sidgwick; she was assisted at various times by Miss Alice Johnson, Professor Sidgwick and Dr. A. T. Myers. The hypnotist was almost always G. A. Smith; and he also provided the subjects. Numbers were not the only targets used, but the results obtained with them were the most striking. The most successful subject was a Miss B.

In the first series of experiments 131 numbers (the numbers were drawn out of a bag) out of 664 were correctly guessed when the agent (Smith) and the percipient were in the same room. When they were in separate rooms, the number of successes dropped to 9 out of 228. In the second series striking successes were obtained when agent and percipient were not in the same room. Some of the successful trials were held at Smith's rooms; but some also in Mrs. Sidgwick's lodgings.

(c) *Experiments in the Telepathic Induction of Hypnosis at a Distance* (*Sommeil à Distance*). A number of experimenters reported that they had been able to induce a hypnotic trance in good hypnotic subjects known to them when the subjects concerned were in another room, or even a considerable distance away. Sometimes they had been able to influence the subject's behaviour in addition to inducing the trance. Cf. Janet's Experiments, *P.S.P.R.* IV (1886), pp. 131-7; the cases given by Gurney, *P.S.P.R.* V (1888), pp. 221-3; and the experiments of Richet, *P.S.P.R.* V (1888), pp. 32-52.

5. *Assorted Experiments on the 'Guessing' of the Suits of Playing Cards, of Two-figure Numbers, etc.* A number of persons sent in the results of



#### APPENDIX A

experiments of these kinds which they had carried out in response to an appeal by Gurney. Some of the results were highly significant. Cf. *Phantasms* I, pp. 33-4, and II, pp. 653-4 (where the very striking results obtained by the Misses Wingfield are recorded). In most of these cases, however, the experimenters themselves seem to have been both agents and percipients, and were no doubt in the same room during the experiments.

#### APPENDIX B: CRITICS OF MRS. PIPER

Writers who confine their attention to accounts of Mrs. Piper's off-days can make a black case against her. See e.g. Tuckett, *op. cit.*, pp. 321-95, and E. Clodd, *The Question: if a Man Die Shall he Live again?* London, 1917, pp. 190-214. Mrs. Piper's 'confession' has also proved popular with keen disbelievers; 'confession' was simply the heading given by a newspaper to an account of an interview with her in which she said that she herself was uncertain as to the nature of her 'controls' (see *J.S.P.R.* X (1901), pp. 192-3, 150-2). A good many of the fallacious stories about Mrs. Piper put forward by rationalist critics are strung conveniently together in C. E. M. Hansel's *E.S.P.: A Scientific Evaluation*, New York, 1966, pp. 224-7. I will quote some passages, inserting my own comments in square brackets. It is only fair to Professor Hansel to add that he has been misled by one wholly unreliable source (E. Clodd, *Rationalist P.A. Annual*, London, 1921, pp. 40-2) filtered through another wholly unreliable source (J. F. Rinn, *Searchlight on Psychical Research*, London, 1954, pp. 122-31).

After some remarks (p. 223) on 'the standard procedures of fake mediums' (all of which are inapplicable to Mrs. Piper), Professor Hansel goes on (p. 225):

'She was also able to describe the location of a tin box containing some of Pellew's private papers, which had been missing since his death. Eventually Hodgson, who up to then had been sceptical about the whole affair, was so impressed by this accumulation of evidence that he announced his conversion to spiritualism. [It was certainly not the tin box case—for which see *P.S.P.R.* XIII (1898), pp. 202-3—which particularly impressed Hodgson. His conversion to belief in paranormality of the phenomena was slow, and preceded by several years his conversion, likewise slow, to belief in the agency of departed persons.] Then, after his death in 1906 [1905], he became Mrs. Piper's control [one of them], only to be eventually ousted by the spirits of such celebrities as George Eliot and Julius Caesar [they in fact appeared almost ten years *before* Hodgson's death].



'Despite the voluminous reports and the eminence of the investigators, it is clear that the case for Mrs. Piper's extrasensory powers rests mainly on the G.P. Series.' [This, I hope, is disproved even by the tiny portions of the evidence which I have been able to quote or refer to.]

After some remarks about Phinuit's deficiencies, Hansel goes on (p. 226):

'The validity of this investigation is weakened by two points that are overlooked by writers sympathetic to the demonstration of psychic phenomena. First, it was never thought necessary to check G.P.'s statements about his earthly life. [This is nonsense. See *P.S.P.R.* XIII, pp. 295-335; it might also be pointed out that what was so convincing to many sitters was that 'G.P.' exhibited detailed knowledge of the concerns of Pellew's *friends*.] This was largely due to the tone of the reports submitted by Hodgson to the Society for Psychical Research. In them it was repeatedly implied that Pellew's parents supported the statements made by G.P. and that they were occasionally present in person at the séances. [Records of the séances which they attended are still in existence. Mrs. Pellew's answers to questions are frequently given *P.S.P.R.* XIII, pp. 295-335; but so far as I know the only expressions of opinion concerning the G.P. communicator attributed to her or her husband are those quoted from their own letters on p. 304. They are favourable.] Later, the Pellew family, which had pointedly remained aloof from the excitement and publicity about G.P., flatly denied that any material reported from Mrs. Piper's séances had any connection with George Pellew. [See the preceding comment, and also the comment on C. E. Pellew's statement below.] His mother, when refusing an invitation from Hodgson to join the American Society for Psychical Research, referred to G.P.'s communications as 'utter drivel and inanity.' [But Mrs. Pellew *did* join the S.P.R., as can be seen from its published membership lists; and she remained a member for at least ten years.]

'George's brother, C. E. Pellew, Professor of Literature [Chemistry] at Columbia . . . stated that the famous tin box was in fact empty [Hodgson also states this quite clearly *P.S.P.R.* XIII, p. 303] and that the papers referred to by G.P. had been in the possession of a friend for many years. He referred scornfully to the "absolute unreliability of the believers in the Mrs. Piper cult." He wrote in a letter to a friend (Edward Clodd), "I was finally persuaded to see Mrs. Piper, and found her a bright, shrewd, ill-educated, commonplace woman who answered glibly enough questions where guessing

was easy, or where she might have obtained previous information. But whenever I asked anything that would be known only to George himself, she was either silent or entirely wrong." [This is *not* Professor Pellew's opinion of Mrs. Piper, but that of John Fiske, a noted philosopher and historian, who had had some sittings with her. Fiske is referred to in the papers on Mrs. Piper under the pseudonym of 'Marte', and his unsuccessful sittings are quoted at length in various places. I gave an excerpt from one of them above, pp. 259-60. Clodd alleges (Rinn, p. 127) that Hodgson claimed that Fiske had been completely convinced by G.P.'s answering some questions concerning his (G.P.'s) ancestors, who had been prominent in the Revolutionary wars. However, Hodgson quotes the sitting concerned in full (*P.S.P.R.* XIII, pp. 419-21); he makes Fiske's negative attitude quite plain and explicitly states (p. 422) that he does not himself regard the communications as having evidential value.]